Horticulture Diagnostic Laboratory

Cornell University
Cooperative Extension
of Suffolk County
www.ccesuffolk.org

Extension Education Center
423 Griffing Ave, Ste 100
Riverhead, NY 11901-3071
631-727-4126

Bayard Cutting Arboretum
Montauk Hwy
Great River, NY 11739
631-581-4223

Larder Beetle

Dermestes lardarius L.

Injury: In the past, home stored meats and raw hides were frequently damaged by larder beetles. Modern methods of meat storage and meat distribution have eliminated this food source for the beetle larvae. Presently, larder beetles are more of a nuisance pest, although they may attack some pantry products such as dried pet food.

Fig. 1. Adult larder beetle (Jarmo Holopainen http://www.pbase.com/holopain/image/16494303)

Fig. 2. Larder beetle larva. (*Note the curved spines at the tip of the abdomen.*) (Jarmo Holopainen http://www.pbase.com/holopain/image/32059066)

The occurrence of larder beetles in the home may be associated with the presence of a dead rodent—mouse, rat, chipmunk or squirrel—within the walls of the house, or in an attic or crawl space. Accumulations of dead insects such as cluster flies in lamp globes, within walls, or at attic windows, may also support large numbers of larder beetles. Fledgling birds or abandoned nests beneath the eaves or in an attic may attract larder beetles. Museum specimens, feathers, horn, hair, hides, and beeswax, as well as dried meat or fish, biscuits or other dry pet food, are all susceptible to attack.

Description and Life History: Adult beetles (**Fig.** 1) are about 1/3 inch (8-10mm) long, dark brown in color for most of the body, interrupted by a broad, somewhat yellowish gray band across the front portion of the forewings. The band may show six darker spots. Adults are attracted to larval food sources on which they lay their eggs. Adult beetles are sometimes observed outdoors where they have been feeding upon the pollen of flowers.

Eggs are deposited on suitable food sources and are seldom observed. In summer they hatch in 12 days or less.

Larvae are dark reddish brown to near black in color, hairy, and bear a pair of small backward curved spines (urogomphi) near the tip of the abdomen (**Fig. 2**). Larvae feed until the food source is consumed, after which they move about in search of further nourishment. It is this movement that frequently leads to their discovery. In a heavy infestation hundreds of individuals may creep from beneath baseboards, around windowsills or from electrical fixtures. Full-grown larvae are nearly 1/2 inch in length.

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When larvae are full-grown, they search for a place to pupate, and often bore into nearby structural components, especially wood or paper. The actual damage they do is slight, as they do not bore to eat, simply to have a sheltered place to pupate. Pupae (an inactive stage) are covered with the last larval skin, and are found in sheltered places near larval food.

Adults emerge from the pupae and the cycle begins again. A complete generation can occur in 40 to 50 days under ideal conditions (64-68° F and plenty of food) but it is not unusual to have only one generation per year in many areas.

Management: Adult beetles found in the home can be picked up by hand and discarded. When larger numbers of larder beetles are seen, an effort should be made to search out the food source and clean up any uneaten food. If pet food is the source, consider purchasing smaller quantities, or storing unused portions in an insect resistant container. Rodents should be removed from traps regularly. Birds' nests should be cleared away. Light globes should be emptied of insects regularly, and accumulations of dead insects on windowsills should be vacuumed or cleaned up regularly and discarded. Empty or dispose of vacuum bags -- if live insects are left in a vacuum bag they may crawl back out into the storage area.

Screening attics and practicing vigorous rodent control will help prevent larder beetle infestations.

Pesticides should only be used as a last resort. A thorough search and clean up is the best approach for managing these insect pests. However, if a pesticide is deemed necessary, one product registered in New York State in 2011 for larder beetle control in the home contains beta-cyfluthrin. Check the label of any product to make sure larder beetles are listed, and that the product is for indoor use.

Reprinted from *Larder Beetle Dermestes lardarius L.* prepared by: Carolyn Klass, Sr. Extension Associate, Department of Entomology, Cornell University. 4/96.

6/04 Revised by Carolyn Klass.
Updated 12/2009, *4/2011*

The Pesticide Management Education Program (PMEP), in cooperation with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC), maintains a web site with a searchable database for pesticide products currently registered in New York State. Individuals who have Internet access can locate currently registered products containing the active ingredients suggested above at http://pims.psur.cornell.edu/ (NYS PIMS).

This publication contains pesticide recommendations. Changes in pesticide regulations occur constantly and human errors are still possible. Some materials mentioned may no longer be available, and some uses may no longer be legal. All pesticides distributed, sold or applied in New York State must be registered with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC). Questions concerning the legality and/or registration status for pesticide use in New York State should be directed to the appropriate Cornell Cooperative Extension Specialist or your regional NYSDEC office. Read the label before applying any pesticide.

TK: 1/2010, AW:11/2011