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Midwestern Pests

Powder Post Beetles
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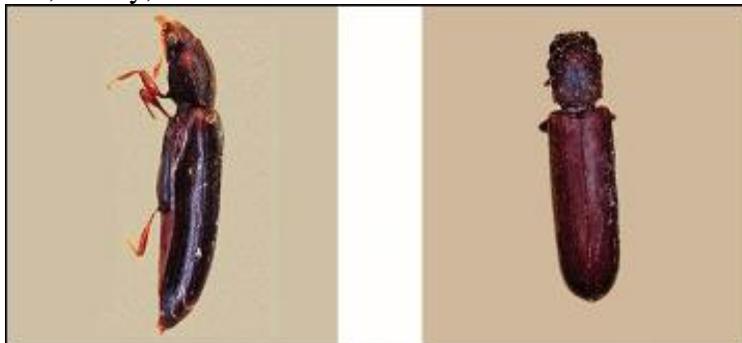
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Midwestern Pests- Article 3

Do Not Invite the Powder Post Beetles!

It is that time of year again! Time to start thinking about planning summer vacations and pool parties, keeping that lawn trimmed, barbecuing on the grill, and, most importantly, checking your home and furniture for signs of powder post beetles. It seems that they enjoy the warm weather just as much as everyone else and they take this opportunity in late spring and all throughout summer to mate with their loved ones in order to ensure another day for the next generation.

Powder post beetles are not native to this area and, according to the University of Florida, they had been introduced, but not established in the United States even in 1950. However, they hitched enough rides in lumber, bamboo, and even in some immigrants' furniture, that they were soon a widespread pest. Now, they are the second most significant wood destroyers in the nation, second to the termites, of course. The lyctid beetle, shown below, is the species that is most common throughout Indiana and the Midwest. According to species, powder post beetles generally prefer one type of wood only, whether it is hardwood or softwood. Some are even so fussy as to prefer pine, and they will rather die than eat anything else. Lyctid beetles, however, enjoy the sapwood areas found in hardwoods like hickory, walnut, ash, cherry, and oak.

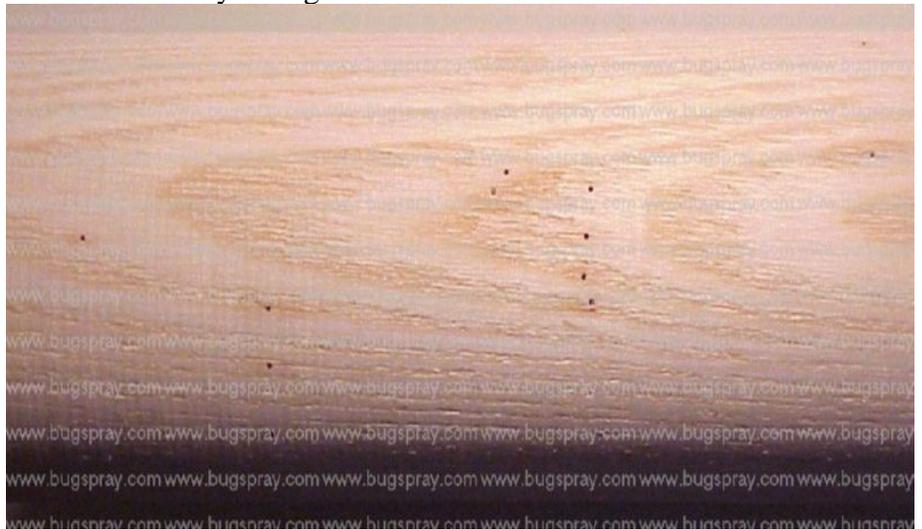


The larvae stage is the longest and that is when the damage to wood is done.

Look for pin-sized holes to determine if you have an infestation.

Few actually see the beetles, but you can look for them around light fixtures and windowsills.

They can be anywhere from 1/12 to 1/5 of an inch long, and can live in your wood from a couple of months to ten years, depending on wood moisture, temperature, and type and age of wood. Normally, they have a life cycle of 1 year that starts with their mother depositing 20 to 50 eggs in cracks and holes along the wood. Shortly afterward, in the larvae stage, the grubs tunnel their way back along the wood and enjoy many months (or years) of feeding. When they are close to the short-lived adult stage where they will mate, deposit eggs, and die, they emerge from the wood, leaving behind a pin-sized opening, and spend a small amount of time as a pupae. The larva stage, however, is where the damage is done. Look to the pictures below for examples of some common exit holes the beetles leave behind when they emerge from the wood.



It is likely that you will never see the actual beetle because they spend most of their lives chewing holes through your wood, but if you do, you will probably see them around your windowsill, where they are naturally

Most infestations come from new wood that was housing beetles at the lumberyard.

Beetle frass, or excrement, looks like sawdust and should be found in or around the exit holes.

Finished wood prevents infestation, but a product like Bora-care will penetrate the wood and kill the beetle in all life stages.

The powder post beetle gets its name from its ability to turn wood into powder.

attracted to light. However, for most of us, we will have to look for the exit holes and, in addition, the frass, or excrement that most species of beetle leave behind. Beetle frass may resemble sawdust from newly cut wood, but it is best to take a second look to be sure. Most infestations occur in new homes where wood that has been housing beetles has just come from the lumberyard. Therefore, if it is new, you actually have a greater chance that beetles are living in it.

If you see unusual pin-shaped holes coming out of your wood, give it a couple taps. If you see dust-like frass emerge, that should be a good sign that you may have an active infestation. However, you might be seeing the remnants of a previous infestation. Since beetles feed slowly, you have a good amount of time to control the problem, so it may be best to re-cover the holes with paint or varnish. This not only prevents the beetles from infesting your wood since there are no available cracks or crevices that make it easy to burrow their eggs in, but if you see those tiny holes again the following spring, you know you must take action.

Powder post beetles love log homes, wood floors, trim, floor joists, etc. Your best preventative measure to keep these things safe is to have them covered with paint or varnish. If you have not done that yet, it would be in your best interest to cover them first with a penetrating insecticide like Bora-care or Tim-bor, which you can order on the internet. As long as your wood is not exposed to weathering conditions, this should be the only step you have to take for a lifetime. The good thing about these products is that, not only will it repel powder puff beetles, but also it will kill the existing larvae that may be living in there already. The last thing you want to do is hold off treatment in the hopes that the infestation will simply die off. Look to the picture below for an example of the damage of which the powder post beetles are capable.



So what do you do if you know you have an

Each species of beetle prefers a different type of wood, so if they are infesting oak, treat all the oak in your home.

Bora-care and Tim-bor cannot penetrate the wood if there is already a finish.

Your pest control company can fumigate individual pieces of furniture, but it is not always necessary for your home.

infestation, and your wood has already been finished? You have several options. First, you can remove and replace the wood that you know is infested. This can be tricky; however, because, while you may know that one piece of wood is housing beetles, it would not be obvious that they are living in another piece of wood in your home. The good news is that you will only have to thoroughly examine all wood of the same type. A species of powder post beetle that is chewing on your oak is not going to be chewing on your pine, as well.

If, on the other hand, you have no desire to replace all of your hardwood flooring, you must strip the floor of any existing finish. Bora-care or Tim-bor may be able to penetrate 2 to 4 inches of wood, but that will be hindered if the wood is already finished. After you have stripped your floors, it is important to spread the Bora-care solution (Bora-care mixed with equal parts of water) evenly, and you must make sure that every possible side of the wood is covered. Do not worry because neither Tim-bor nor Bora-care will affect the appearance or quality of your wood. If you cannot cover every area of the wood with the solution, however, it is not guaranteed that all of your wood will be protected.

If, for instance, you have antique furniture and are worried about the appearance, you can drill tiny holes in the underside of the furniture where you can inject a borate-based gel or have the piece individually fumigated, which many pest control companies offer. There are also alternative methods of control that include freezing the wood at below 0 degrees for several hours, or heating it at over 150 degrees. Little research has really been done to support these methods, however.

If you do not wish to take the time to do these things, remember, you always have the option of fumigation for your entire home. This is not highly recommended because it offers no preventative measure that a beetle will not fly in your window and start infesting your wood again, but it does kill the existing beetles in all stages of their lives. Remember, if you are going to be exposed to or using any insecticide, be sure to follow all safety recommendations on the label or those given to you by your chosen pest control expert.

The picture on the right shows a house that is completely covered in a tent, which is the typical practice of fumigation.



We are currently in the process of working on a series of articles that focus on several insects or pests that are commonly found in real estate in the Midwest. We will tell you about the potential damage they cause to properties and homes and bring you helpful advice on how you can prevent destruction or infestation. As each article in this series is completed, we will be placing them on the website and sending them out via email to everyone on our contact list. To get on the contact list, visit our website at www.goodvaluation.com and register as a new user. Make sure to include your email address. For those who may not have email, contact our office, and we will work with you to determine how you can receive future articles.

For future articles, register on our website or contact our office.

The information analyzed within this article was obtained from research conducted by the author and others in the research department of Good Valuation, Inc. Information was also obtained from web sites such as Michigan State University, Professional Pest Control Products, University of Guelph, www.powderpostbeetles.com, U.S. Inspect, the Menco Website, the University of Florida, and from information obtained from www.fowlerspest.com. Opinions expressed are based on observations and analyses conducted by the author.