

Clover Mites



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The clover mite, *Bryobia praetiosa*, is at times an occasional invader and at other times a major nuisance in homes. Although they don't cause structural damage, bite, or carry disease, clover mites are pests nonetheless. Their pest status arises simply from the sheer numbers, sometimes in the thousands, which invade homes.

Identification

Clover mites are tiny creatures, less than a millimeter long. Their color may vary from brown or green to a rusty red. The eggs and immature mites are bright red. They can be differentiated from other mites by their front legs, which are longer than the other legs and longer than the body.

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Biology and Habits

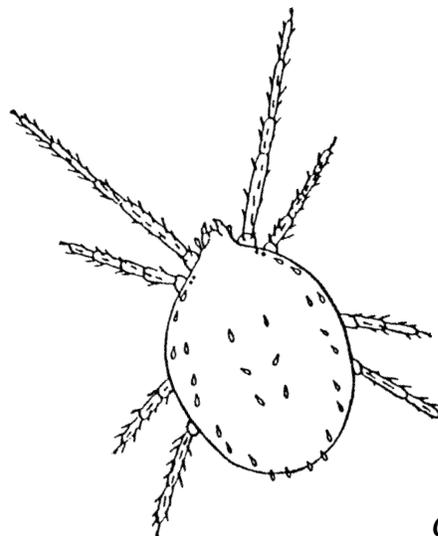
Clover mites are usually more abundant around homes with heavily fertilized lawns or those surrounded by lush vegetation. They live outdoors and feed on a variety of plants. In warm weather, the mites congregate on the warm, sunlit south sides of buildings, or on vegetation, sidewalks, and foundation block.

Their migration into houses is greatest in the spring and fall, usually in response to overpopulation or to unfavorable environmental conditions like drought or cold. They are inactive in very cold or very hot weather.

Indoors, clover mites are usually noticed on windows or window sills, often in bathrooms. If crushed, clover mites leave red spots on walls, clothing, and furniture.

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Clover mites reproduce by parthenogenesis. This means that only females are known to exist. These females are able to reproduce without mating. They lay their eggs on tree bark or in cracks and crevices in foundation blocks. The winter is spent in the egg stage, with hatching occurring in early spring. Several generations are completed by fall. The entire life cycle requires from one to seven months.



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Prevention Methods

Because clover mites are more numerous in heavily fertilized lawns, one simple prevention tactic is not to overfertilize your lawn. Obtain a soil test to help you determine if the grass needs fertilizer. Lush vegetation also seems to be attractive to the mites. Mow grass and other lawn vegetation closely, trim vegetation away from the house, and remove leaf litter close to the foundation. To combat large infestations, you may need to establish a vegetation-free zone of gravel about 2 feet wide all around your house.

Control Strategies

Remove clover mites indoors with a vacuum cleaner to avoid crushing them and staining upholstery and drapes. To prevent mite entry through cracks, caulk exterior cracks or treat cracks around windows and doors and in foundation blocks with a less toxic insecticide. Boric acid, diatomaceous earth, or silica gel dust can be applied with a bulb duster. Be certain to read and follow label directions and to wear a dust mask to avoid breathing the dust.

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