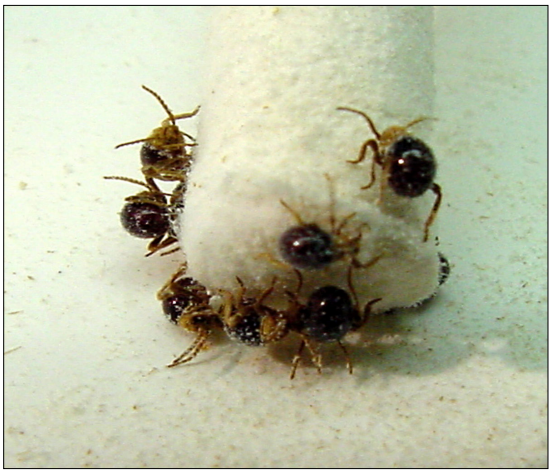
"Bug of the Month"

During the Pacific Northwest winters, insects are often forgotten. The cold temperatures have forced most insects to seek protected places for overwintering where they estivate (hibernation for insects) with visions of warmer temperatures dancing in their heads. Some insects that live at man's expense don't have to worry about the blustery outside temperatures, however. Stored products pests, like the Spider Beetle, are often unwanted holiday guests that take advantage of our hospitality without our consent.

WHAT DO THEY LOOK LIKE? Members of the Ptinidae family are commonly known as spider beetles because they look similar to tiny spiders, with their rounded bodies and spindly legs. These beetles never grow larger than about 5 millimeters in length and many species are covered in tiny hairs, which may be very colorful or even metallic in appearance. Spider beetles can be recognized by their globular shaped bodies, completely covered by the elytra, with their head directed downwards and covered by the pronotum so that it is often not visible from above. Larvae are C-shaped and lightly sclerotized.



WHAT DO THEY DO? : The adult female lays a few eggs, often less than 100, in or near the larval food. The larvae molt three times before spinning a debris-covered cocoon within which they pupate. These beetles survive best indoors, often boring into old wood or cardboard boxes to pupate. These beetles are general scavengers which feed on a wide variety of plant and animal foods including grain products, seeds, dried fruits or meats, wool, and feathers. Most species are active only at night, hiding in cracks and crevices during the day. Some species fly and are attracted to lights at night. The American spider beetle is found throughout the world and is a pest of stored products such as grains and cayenne pepper. There is a closely related stored product pest, called the Northern spider beetle, *Mezium affine*, that it is found in the Northern Hemisphere. It is similar in appearance to *M. americanum* but is distinguished from it in having a continuous line of dense hairs at the base of the elytra (not scalloped). If you encounter large numbers of these beetles in your home, it probably means there is an old bag of dried food in a cupboard somewhere in which this beetle is breeding.

MANAGEMENT.

Control of Spider beetles is not difficult. Good sanitation practices as well as good buying practices, storage, and housekeeping are the best ways to avoid problems with these insects. For the most part, getting rid of the infested product and any open products in close proximity will solve the problem, though you should keep an eye out for any foraging insects over the next few weeks since eggs that were laid nearby may hatch. Sealing bags of food that may remain in the pantry for long periods may prevent infestations of stored products pests. Place the food items in heavy-duty plastic bags. Over-the-counter liquid and dust pesticide formulations can be used to treat cracks and crevices and other voids where the beetles might be hiding during the day, or to prevent future reinfestations. Fumigation is rarely needed.

MORE QUESTIONS? Please do not hesitate to give your "Bug Docs" a call at comm.: (360) 315-4450, DSN: 322-4450 or you can e-mail us at ndveccmei@pnw.med.navy.mil.