

Insects Commonly Mistaken for Bed Bugs

The importance of knowing the difference

The life cycle of insects varies, and understanding what bug you are dealing with will affect the professional treatment of that bug as well as of the symptoms. Misdiagnosing rashes, allergic reactions and itchy “bites” will delay proper treatment and could lead to further discomfort and prolonged irritations. Equally important is understanding which bug you are dealing with to properly disinfect and control pest infestations. Since everyone reacts different to bug bites, the only way to truly know if you have been bitten by a bed bug is to capture it in a bag/container and have it diagnosed by a pest management professional or medical practitioner.

Bed bug physiology

Young nymphs are hatched translucent, and when it feeds, the red blood meal is visible through its translucent body. As the bug goes through 5 nymph stages of development, it grows larger and gets progressively darker. Adult bed bugs are flat, broad, oval shaped and dark brown in colouring. Adult males resemble an “apple seed” shape. They are approximately 4-5 mm long and visible to the naked eye. Bed bugs have a three-segmented body with six legs, and a front wing, but cannot fly.



Insects commonly mistaken for bed bugs

Here is a list of the top insects commonly mistaken for bed bugs:

Booklice

Like cockroach nymphs, Booklice nymphs are similar in appearance to hatched bed bugs as they range in appearance from translucent white, to gray or brown. The greatest difference is that they are smaller in size.

They are not blood feeders. Their primary food source is fungi, pollen, mold and dead insects. They are commonly found along the sides of windows and windowsills and under wallpaper.



Fleas

Fleas are also very similar in shape and colour to bed bugs, but are much smaller in size, roughly 3 mm or 1/8 of an inch. They appear skinnier than bed bugs and stand taller or more vertical to surfaces. They can also jump. Ticks feed on blood but prefer animals such as cats and dogs over humans. They are found near a pet's sleeping area or in carpeting.



Carpet beetles

Carpet beetle adults have round bodies like bed bugs and ticks, but are smaller like fleas (no larger than 2 mm or 1/7 of an inch). The greatest difference is that carpet beetles vary in colour, are often darker brown and can be patterned with white or yellow markings. Another important difference is carpet beetles have wings and can fly. Their preferred diet is pollen and nectar, but they are also known to feed on the shed skins of bed bugs, which adds to the confusion when they are seen in areas previously infested by bed bugs. Carpet beetles do not bite, but a rash can develop if you are exposed to the prickly hairs on their bodies.



Spider beetles

Spider beetle adults are very similar in shape and size of fleas. They are oval and appear "bloated" and dark reddish brown as if they had fed on a blood meal, although they are blood feeders.



Cockroach nymphs

Cockroach nymphs are similar in appearance to hatched bed bugs as they appear translucent/white immediately after hatching or molting and turn a darker reddish brown with each nymph stage, much like a bed bug. The biggest difference is that cockroach nymphs are more cylindrical in shape



opposed to oval. Nymphs hide in cracks and crevices which are warm and moist and stay close to their food source. They are most active at night. They are known to trigger asthmatic reactions and attacks.

Ticks

Ticks are very similar in shape and colour to bed bugs, but have eight legs rather than six, indicating they belong to the arachnid family. Like bed bugs, ticks also feed on blood and can bite humans, although they prefer animal hosts. The greatest difference between ticks and bed bugs is that ticks latch onto their hosts and burrow their heads into the skin while biting. Ticks are also known carriers of a number of diseases that affect humans and animals.



Additional resources

[5 Pests Commonly Mistaken for Bed Bugs](#) by Orkin

[Bugs Often Mistaken For Bed Bugs](#) by Denise Donovan