

Traveling? Don't Bring Home Unwanted Souvenirs

By Bonnie Martin

It has been many years since bed bugs have been a problem in the U.S. The old pesticides that are no longer approved for use wiped out the problem for many years, and bed bugs were insects that only pre WWII generations might have had much experience with. For others, the closest experience with them might have been in sayings such as "Sleep tight. Don't let the bedbugs bite".

With the increase of international travel and the reduction in the potency of legal pesticides, the occurrence of bed bugs in our country is on the rise. The best method of control is to learn how to recognize and prevent bringing these pests home with you from your travels.

The common bed bug is a wingless reddish-brown, six- legged insect approximately ¼" in length. Its oval, flat shape allows it to hide in mattresses, box springs, sofas, and many other tight spots where they might have access to humans. If a light is turned on, they scurry off to hiding.

Bed bugs feed on human blood and can travel on anything to a new location and hide almost anywhere. They become active and feed at night by biting and injecting an anesthetic agent to numb the area as they suck blood. The bites cause the skin to itch and swell on some people. Others don't have a reaction.

Bed bugs are extremely difficult and expensive to get rid of once a place has them. It requires specialized equipment to eradicate them, and it is a very time consuming job. They can hide many places in a room and can live for up to a year without a blood feast. Once infested, a room has to be thoroughly treated from top to bottom, a very labor intensive, expensive job.

The best way to avoid bed bugs is to detect them before you unpack and spend the night in a new location. Check the mattress, including the seams, for blackish fecal stains that indicate bed bug activity. Look in sofa cushions and on the walls or carpet seams for the same signs.

If you think you have stayed in a place with bed bugs, be careful with your belongings. You might want to unload your suitcases outside of your home and wash all the clothing in hot water and dry at high heat before putting it away.

It is much easier to prevent infesting your home with bed bugs than it is to get rid of them once you have them. Please take the precaution of checking places away from home where you might spend time sleeping or lounging to make sure you don't end up with something you are sure to NOT want.