

## The Green Notebook

### Don't Let the Bed Bugs Bite

Okay, this is not a fun topic to discuss, but discuss it we should. As I mentioned in last week's column about bed bug prevention, education and awareness is key! So read on, even if it makes your stomach churn.

So how do you know if you have bed bugs taking up residence in your home? It's not easy to determine because the bugs are so small and like to stay hidden during the day. What they look like really depends on their stage of life: adults are about the size of an apple seed and the youngest nymph can be the size of a speck of dirt. If they bugs haven't eaten yet, they are light-colored (making them even harder to see), whereas if they have fed, they are red, rust or brownish colored. You can look up photos online if you want to see what they look like—they are small and flat and remind me of an oblong light-skinned tick.

Since it is usually not a visual sighting that will alert you to the bugs presence (although it could be), you have to look for other clues like bites and droppings or sheddings.

Bites are also hard to identify, especially if you are not very allergic. They are typically a large red welt or raised area on the skin—similar to a mosquito bite. Often they can appear in a row of one, two or three welts, but can also appear singularly (depends on whether the bug gets interrupted during the "meal"). The bites are usually very itchy, but that would vary with your allergic reaction.

Bed bugs also cast their skin each time they grow, so you might find these. The sheddings may also include eggs, dead bugs or dried up larvae. (I told you this is not fun to talk about...)

Another sign could be blood stains on your bed sheets or pajamas. These stains can be tiny or in streaks or larger splotches. Blood stains are not a definitive sign, however, but might alert you to a problem in combination with other signs. You might even notice some brown specks in clusters on the mattress or sheets as well. These are fecal stains and are another good clue of an infestation.

So now what? Get online and learn more, especially if you think you have a problem. Quick action is key, so call a local pest management expert with experience in bed bugs to confirm an infestation and do everything they tell you to do to help get rid of this pest. To learn more, go to the websites I mentioned last week and to [BedBugger.com](http://BedBugger.com). There are some early detection monitors you can purchase which might be worth it to you (\$50). Check it out at [USBedBugs.com](http://USBedBugs.com) but above all, just stay informed.

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