DIG THIS By Peg Tillery (for 08-30-06) Ants and other critters © 2006

This time of year don't panic when you see flying ants and termites, it's the reproductive stage in their life cycle. Females who have the potential to become queens fly out of their homes in the woods and ground to set up camp with wingless males. New colonies begin this way. Very few live or set up colonies.

To tell if you're seeing ants or termites look at their bodies. An ant's body has three very distinct sections: head, thorax (middle) and abdomen (tail). You'll also notice that termite bodies are relatively flat and wide with two sections. Ant antennae have segments and a slight bend to them (some ants have nearly 90 degree bends in their antennae). Our local ants have black bodies with one variety having red fronts and black backs. Termites are mahogany (or sepia) colored.

For abundant information on ants go online to http://wsu.edu and key in the word ants on the search bar. You'll find information, photos and publications to read or download explaining everything you'll ever want to know about ants and then some.

Speaking of insects, I learned some very helpful tips on controlling apple maggot from the Peninsula Fruit Club members at the Kitsap County Fair.

Outgoing President Mike Shannon taught explained that to control apple maggot you have to bait both for the males and the females. Males go for the fluorescent yellow color that painted on cardboard or wooden rectangles to hang from fruit trees earlier in the season. Right before the fruit begins to come on to the tree in early spring you'll put up red balls (or even red apples from the store) covered in tangle foot to trap the females as they're looking for places to lay their eggs. The traps catch nearly all the apple maggot flies before they can infest the fruit. Both the red and yellow traps stay up all season and need to be refreshed periodically.

Peninsula Fruit Club members also warn that apple maggot is beginning to affect stone fruits particularly plums. They also suspect apple maggot is beginning to attack blueberries. The yellow traps and red traps work for this problem too. Fruit club members are reporting success with the yellow and red traps. They're also looking into a biological control for apple maggot that Aggie Allpress recommends. Stay tuned for more details on this method. Mike Shannon will report back to me in the spring so I can pass on information to our readers.

What you can do this fall, during and after harvest, is always immediately clean up any dropped fruit. Double bag spoiled fruit and put it in the trash. You definitely do not want to compost fruit infested with apple maggot and you do not want to leave it on the ground to reinfest next year's fruit. Our Food Safety Advisors say, "The maggots introduce bacteria and leave a mucky trail throughout the fruit, do not try to eat or make any preserved food out of the fruit."

To learn more about the Peninsula Fruit Club attend one of their meetings held the second Thursday of the month at Bremerton Parks and Recreation Center, 680 Lebo Blvd in east Bremerton. You do not need to be a member to attend their meetings.

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