

# URBAN PEST NEWS

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## Kissing Bugs & Chagas Disease

Triatomine bugs, also known as kissing bugs, reduviid bugs and cone-nose bugs, are almost an inch long with elongated cone-shaped heads. The body is grayish-brown with a wide abdomen that has flattened sides. The flattened sides of the abdomen stick out beyond the wing margins and are marked with red, orange or yellow stripes. Nymphs (immatures) look similar to adults, but lack fully developed wings.

There are other insects in Texas that look similar and can be mistaken for kissing bugs. For a list of common look-alikes please go to <http://kissingbug.tamu.edu/found-a-bug/>

Adults are capable of flying and are attracted to lights at night. The insects can be drawn towards the house by leaving outside lights on at night. Once inside, they will find a host and feed at night. After engorging themselves, they move away from the host to hide in cracks and crevices during the day. Outside, the bugs can be found in animal bedding or nests such as doghouses, chicken coops or rodent nests.

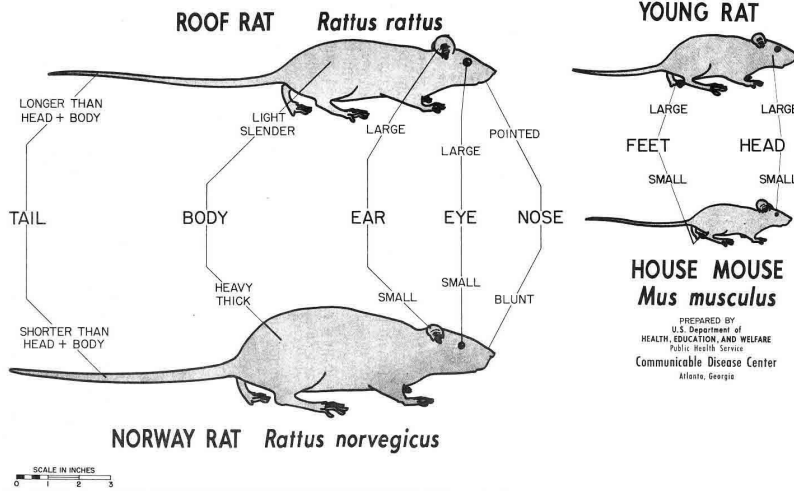
Bites are often not felt at first, but can lead to itching, swelling and redness. Some people are allergic to the chemicals injected by the insect while feeding and for some may lead to an anaphylactic reaction.

Some Triatomine bugs can carry the parasite *Trypanosoma cruzi* which can cause Chagas disease in humans, dogs and other small mammals. *T. cruzi*, a protozoan, is transmitted via the insect's feces when it is scratched into a wound or rubbed into a mucous membrane. Immediate (acute) symptoms of Chagas may be swelling of the face (especially around the eye), swelling of other body areas, moderate to high fever and disturbance of the heart rhythm. Treatment is available during the acute phase, so see a physician as soon as possible if you suspect Chagas.

To reduce the chance of Triatomine bugs entering the home, work on excluding them. Some of the following may help to manage the bugs.

- Prune trees and shrubs so they do not touch or overhang the house
- Do not stack firewood or other items against the house
- Seal openings into the home with sealant, weather stripping, screens, copper mesh, etc.
- Turn off outside lights at night. If that is not possible, use "bug bulbs" that have a wavelength less attractive to insects
- Pesticides can be used to target areas of kissing bug activity such as dog houses/ kennels, indoor cracks and crevices where the insects hide or outside possible entry areas
- Control and remove rodent nests from the area

FIELD IDENTIFICATION OF DOMESTIC RODENTS



Norway Rat  
Average Length 3/4 inch



Roof Rat  
Average Length 1/2 inch



House Mouse  
Average Length 1/4 inch



Commensal rodents, such as rats and mice, often move into homes with the arrival of cooler temperatures. They can gnaw upholstery, books, pipes, irrigation systems and garbage cans causing a lot of damage and sometimes even starting fires from chewing electrical wires.

Trapping is a common way to eliminate rodents. Common traps include glueboards, snap traps and live traps. When using traps, a food item, or bait, is typically used to lure the rodent. Good baits include food items such as peanut butter, fruit, candy and jelly. Traps are best utilized when placed along walls where rodents prefer to move. When using snap traps, place traps perpendicular to the wall and place several traps together in succession. It may also help to place traps with food bait for a couple of days but not setting the traps to allow the rodents to get used to getting food. Once bait is taken regularly, rebait the trap and set it to capture the rodent. Traps can be reused. When disposing of rodents either wear gloves or use a plastic bag over your hand to release the rodent from the trap.

There are also commercial baits available to poison rodents. If you use baits, **do not** place baits where non-target organisms can gain access. Use tamper-resistant bait stations to hold bait products to avoid dogs, cats or even children from consuming the bait. Many baits are grain based, so it is important to dispose of the bait once the rodent problem is resolved. Rodent bait left for long periods of time will often lead to insect pests moving into the area to feed on the grain in the bait.

Once rodents are removed from the structure, the home should be sealed to exclude the pests from moving back in. Holes can be sealed with hardware cloth. Check around the outside of the home as well as in the attic for openings. Also, trim back any tree branches overhanging the roof to remove an easy access to the home.

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For more information contact:

1600-B Smith Road  
Austin, TX 78721

Wizzie Brown

512-854-9600  
[ebrown@ag.tamu.edu](mailto:ebrown@ag.tamu.edu)

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