What's buggin' you these days? The latest nuisance in local landscapes is the golden rain tree bug (*Jadera*). Got a golden rain tree in your neighborhood? Then you have most likely seen this red and black bug and its many brothers, sisters and cousins on the lawn, fence, shrubs and the sidewalk. They appear in clusters like they are having quite a party and have red eyes as if they have had too much of a good time.

The red abdomen and black wings create a distinctive color pattern. Some gardeners wonder if they are lady bug beetles, but the elongated body shape and soft wings that cross over the back differentiate the golden rain tree pest from the beneficial lady bug.

The breeding behavior of golden rain tree bugs is similar to that of pesky love bugs so you may see them attached at the tail end of the abdomen as they crawl across the landscape.
Golden rain tree bugs are a relative of the box elder bugs, which many transplanted residents recognize from northern landscapes. They are also related to stink bugs but are called scentless plant bugs because they don't give off an odor when squished.

The insect is not considered a major pest but is so prolific it causes alarm. The biggest concern is that the outbreak is so numerous it could be killing something. Instead of running for poisons to blast the pests into the next millennium, consider what they are up to.

Golden rain tree bugs are seed bugs, feeding on the seeds of golden rain trees. Ever pulled seedlings from your mulched flower beds? If these bugs damage the seeds and prevent them from sprouting, they have my vote and I say leave them alone. Sounds like an interesting science fair project, eh? You may also notice them on althea or hibiscus shrubs, as well as any other shrub near by but they are not known to cause damage to them.

Insecticides, pesticides that kill insects, are not necessary for this insect. They are seasonal and will die off after a few weeks of aggravating you. Swish them off the sidewalk with a blower if you want but don't squish them or they may leave a stain from their body juices. Try to tolerate them and avoid outdoor activities if they get on your nerves.

If you don't want them inside your house, it is critical that you have good weather stripping on the bottom of the garage door and other doors. They don't want to get inside, but may wander in if there is a crack big enough to crawl through.

Many insects are more of a nuisance than a health threat or plant pest. Learn more about the critters in your yard before you set out to do battle. Many are harmless or even beneficial.

Bring insect samples for identification to the Master Gardener Plant Clinic at the Osceola County Extension Office Monday to Friday from 10 AM to 2 PM. We are located on highway 192 at the fair grounds. Call (321) 697-3000 or email your digital photos to epabon5@ufl.edu.

Information on many common Florida insects is online at our University of Florida Featured Creatures web site. Go to http://creatures.ifas.ufl.edu/trees/jadera_bugs.htm and search by key word, common name or scientific name. Basic biology and photos are available and make a great reference for home gardeners, science teachers and students.

Real entomology enthusiasts can check out our Pest Alert site to find many insect related press releases. http://pestalert.ifas.ufl.edu/

If you are out and about today, stop by Celebration downtown and visit with the Master Gardener volunteers. They will have many books and gardening fact sheets on hand and answer common gardening questions. The white tent and information booth will be by the Town Hall building. Peg Owens, Master Gardener will be speaking at 11 am and I will be on at 2 p.m. as part of the Plantation Hall Open House festivities. Follow the signs off Celebration Avenue or get directions from the Master Gardeners. Come see us and enjoy a wonderful spring day.

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