

STINK BUGS COULD BE BACK IN FORCE IN 2013

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WINCHESTER — The brown marmorated stink bug could be making a resurgence in the local region.

The bugs reached their crop-destroying pinnacle in 2010, when about \$37 million in losses from damage to apple crops occurred in Mid-Atlantic states. Raspberries and blackberries were also ravaged, and many organic farmers saw significant damage to crops of tomatoes, peppers and beans, experts reported.

For some unknown reason, their numbers dropped in the fall of 2011.

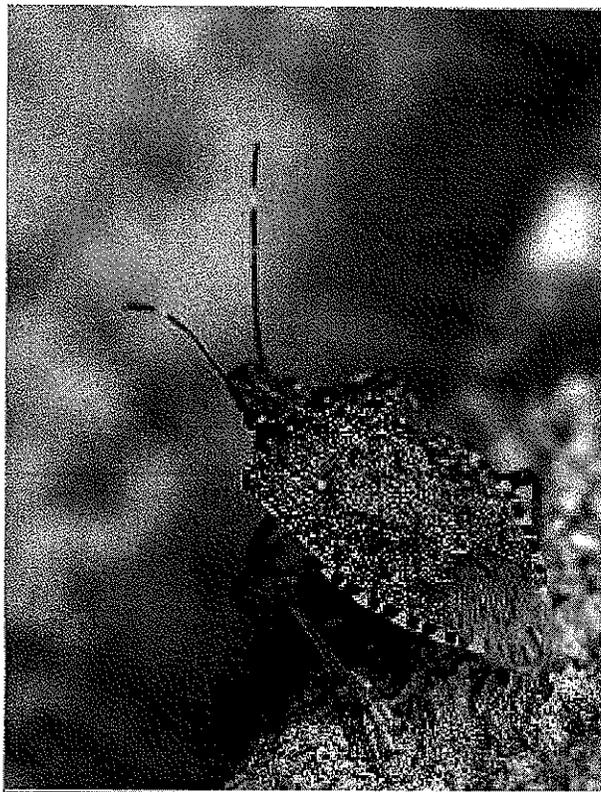
But the numbers could be on the rise again as scientists found there was a 60 percent increase in stink bugs overwintering in fall 2012 compared to fall 2011.

Entomologists say that if they survive the winter, the number of stink bugs in 2013 could be similar to 2010.

“We know many more bugs went into overwintering sites in 2012 like they did in 2009,” said Tracy Leskey, a research entomologist with the U.S. Agriculture Department, who collected the data. “We want growers to be cautious. It could be that many more bugs will exist in spring 2013.”

During overwintering, stink bugs wait out the winter season in places such as houses or barns. In the spring, the insects leave these sites to head outdoors. Although factors like low or fluctuating temperatures could kill off some of the bugs this winter, scientists believe there won't be a significant impact.

“I don't think the short, relatively cold snap is going to significantly increase overwintering mortality,” said Chris Bergh, professor of entomology at Virginia Tech.



Seemingly omnipresent stink bugs are making a comeback, and their numbers could be as high this year as they were at their 2010 peak. (Photo by Scott Mason/The Winchester Star)

“The size of the overwintering population in 2012-13 is bigger than it was last year and may be considerably bigger.”

As of now, there’s no guarantee that a majority of the bugs will survive the winter, but Bergh and Leskey want to keep area growers vigilant.

“There could be more pressure on the crops this year,” Bergh said.

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