

Kissing bug identification requires closer look

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Adult Triatoma, kissing bug next to a penny.

Because most of us take little time to look closely at insects, it should not be surprising that [recent television stories about “kissing bugs” and Chagas disease](#) have created a frenzy of sorts among people thinking they have captured or seen kissing bugs around the home. While a few of these have turned out to be actual kissing bugs (genus *Triatoma*), most are not; and [laboratories set up to identify and test kissing bugs](#) have been overwhelmed this month with samples.

But not all insects vaguely resembling the pictures you might see on television or [in the newspaper](#) are kissing bugs. In fact, there are over 38,000 different kinds of insects in the “true bugs” suborder to which kissing bugs belong. So to make things easier, let’s review what to look for when a suspicious “bug” shows up in your home or landscape.

Adult, fully grown kissing bugs range in size from **1/2 inch to over 1 1/4 inches** long (usually about 1 inch-long). They are **pear-shaped and dark brown to black in body color, often with distinct, reddish- to cream-colored stripes visible along the edges of the abdomen** (tail). There are no markings on the wings, although some kissing bugs may show some orange at the base of the wings, next to the shield behind the head.



Three of the different kinds of kissing bug found in Texas vary slightly in size and coloration, but share all the key characters of this genus. Photo courtesy Gabe Hamer, Texas A&M University.

The kissing bug **head is stick-like** but tapering, with eyes bulging from the sides and bottom of the head. Besides “kissing bug”, these insects are often called “conenose bugs”.

The six **legs are relatively thin and tapering**, not swollen or bulging. There are no distinctive spines or spikes on kissing bug legs, sides or top.

While some insects may have some of these characters, only insects with all of these characteristics are likely to be kissing bugs. Add to this that kissing bugs come out mostly at night, and it shouldn't be too difficult to distinguish kissing bugs from all other insects.

Common Imposters Below are other insects that have some of the characteristics of kissing bugs. So lets look at a few.



Bed bug. Small indoor bugs, 3/16 inch-long when fully grown.



Wheel bug. Outdoor insects. Spined “wheel” behind the head.



Box elder bug. Lacks bands on the margin of the abdomen. Does not bite.



Squash bug. Similar size as kissing bug, but shorter, triangular head vs. long “neck” of kissing bug.



Bark stink bug. Smaller, not as long as adult kissing bugs. Does not bite.



Leaf-footed bug. As large, or larger, than kissing bugs. Large hind legs.

Info above from: <http://citybugs.tamu.edu/2015/12/01/kissing-bug-identification-requires-closer-look/>

For more info on Kissing bugs and other insects and pests: <http://citybugs.tamu.edu>

Wichita County Agent, David Graf
Texas A&M AgriLife Extension
600 Scott Street, Ste. 200
Wichita Falls, Tx. 76301
940-716-8610

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