

# When It Rains, It Pours

Spring showers may bring May flowers, but they also mean pests are on the prowl.

By Ron Harrison, Ph.D. | Director of Technical Services, Orkin, LLC

As winter yields to rainy days and warmer weather, budding flowers aren't the only things popping up on school grounds. Pests such as insects, spiders and ticks are starting to emerge in preparation for the months of reliable food, water, shelter and ideal temperatures that come with summer. And while your students may be hatching vacation plans, it's time for you to start preparing for pest season by creating an organized landscaping and maintenance routine.

Landscaping plays a crucial role in the overall appearance of your campus, but it can also be a huge attractant to everything from ants to rodents to cockroaches. In fact, according to a survey by *Pest Control Technology*, 45 percent of all cockroach control services are performed in the summer, meaning the decisions you make now could have a serious impact on the health and safety of your students in the coming months.

Pests such as cockroaches are a concern in school environments because of the health risks they pose. The Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America (AAFA) reports that up to 60 percent of children in urban environments who have asthma are sensitive to allergens found in cockroach feces, saliva and molted skins. Children who are allergic to cockroaches are also 3.3 times more likely to be hospitalized, requiring nearly twice the number of medical visits than other asthmatic children.

Given the increase in pest pressure that comes with spring, it's important to ensure your pest management program is designed to prevent pests, rather than react to them in the event of an infestation. ►



To help reduce pest threats and avoid exposing students and staff to unnecessary chemical applications, consider employing an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) program and work with your pest management professional to incorporate the following landscaping tips:

- Clear gutters. Clogged gutters are often ideal breeding grounds for ants, mosquitos and cockroaches.
- Keep foliage at least two feet from the building and avoid planting ground-covering plants, such as ivy. Vegetation and mulch can serve as housing for pests, providing a covered and insulated habitat.
- Consider installing a 30-inch wide gravel strip around the entire exterior of the building, if practical. This strip discourages rodents, which do not like to be out in the open.
- Sweep or mop up any standing water on sidewalks or in parking lots that has been there for a few hours or longer, as this can serve as an easy water source for pests. Regularly monitor common walking areas for trash and debris.
- Line all outdoor trashcans and use tight-fitting lids to reduce access for pests.

- Avoid planting certain fragrant and brightly colored flowers that can attract bees and other flying/stinging pests. Talk with your pest management professional about which species of vegetation to avoid.
- Consider pencil cedar mulch as an alternative to popular organic mulch, which attracts rats because it provides significantly more moisture than other varieties. Cedar mulch, on the other hand, holds much less moisture and also has been proven to repel Argentine ants.

By working with your employees and pest control provider to keep a clean and well-maintained property, you can help keep pests out of sight and out of mind this spring.

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