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Writer: Sharon Omahen (770) 229-3219 ([sharono@uga.edu](mailto:sharono@uga.edu))

Source: Lisa Ames (770) 228-7220 ([lames@griffin.uga.edu](mailto:lames@griffin.uga.edu))

## UGA expert helps homeowners identify insects

**By Sharon Omahen  
University of Georgia**

Lisa Ames spends her workdays getting up close and personal with insects, about 500 a year to be exact.

Working in the University of Georgia's Homeowner Insect and Weed Diagnostic Laboratory in Griffin, Ga., Ames helps UGA Cooperative Extension agents identify insect samples for Georgia homeowners.

"Most of the time, the county agents can easily identify the insects that are brought into their offices," she said. "I get involved when the samples aren't so easy to identify."

Ames says if a homeowner has captured it, chances are she can and has identified it. Most of the samples Ames receives come to her in vials of alcohol.

Since 2002, she has identified more than 2,000 insect and weed samples through the laboratory which is operated by the UGA College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences. Although the insect samples vary from year to year, Ames says most of the samples are either ornamental insects, stored paper-product insects or spiders.

"Most of the spider samples that people think are brown recluses are actually filistatids or southern house spiders," she said. "The brown recluse has six eyes arranged in three pairs."

Ames says the "fiddle" is much larger on the brown recluse than on the southern house spider.

"The fiddle, or violin, is the marking on the spider's back that has a shape resembling the musical instrument," she said. "It's so small on the southern house spider that it's almost insignificant."

The most common samples Ames receives are what she refers to as "stored product and paper" insects.

"These are the insects, like drug-store beetles and sawtoothed grain beetles, that are found in flour and other pantry products," she said. "I get a lot of Indian meal moth samples because they get into dog food and bird seed."

Ames says county agents send these common samples to her because many stored product pests are very small and require a microscope to ensure a positive identification. She gets a lot of termite samples for the same reason.

"I get a lot of termites, because

extension agents want to have confirmation before they give homeowners that kind of news," she said.

Ames also identifies a lot of insects that homeowners view as harmful.

"I often get insects that homeowners have found in groups," she said. "When insects congregate, people usually assume they are up to no good."

But not all of the insects Ames identifies are harmful.

"I get a lot of beneficial insect samples just because they bite, sting or are scary looking," she said.

In addition to the spider, termite and stored product samples, Ames gets a fair number of centipede, giant flatheaded worm and giant resin bee samples, too.

The number of samples she's received this year has been reduced by the state's drought conditions.

In addition to the insect samples, Ames also identifies about 50 weed samples per year, most of which are submitted in April and July.

*(Sharon Omahen is a news editor with the University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences.)*