

New UF cell phone 'app' lets users identify pests with photos, text

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Australian cockroaches crawl on a portable computer displaying the new iPest1 application, developed by University of Florida entomologist Rebecca Baldwin of the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, in this photo taken June 7, 2010. The app includes photos and text describing 40 common household pests and is compatible with several Apple devices.

(PhysOrg.com) -- Homeowners and pest control technicians have a new option for identifying bugs lurking in houses and other buildings -- and it's as close as a cell phone.

A downloadable application developed by researchers with the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences

provides color photos and text describing almost 40 pest species.

Called iPest1, it's one of the first mobile-phone apps dealing with pest insects. It's compatible with Apple mobile devices including the popular [iPhone](#) and sells for \$1.99.

“Proper identification of [pests](#) is crucial in effective pest management. I wanted to have a mobile guide to household pests, to help educate people,” said UF entomologist Rebecca Baldwin, principal developer. “I couldn't find one, so we ended up creating one.”

The material focuses on four topics — cockroaches, filth-breeding flies, pests that occasionally enter dwellings and pest droppings. Many of the species included are found nationwide or even worldwide, but the selection leans toward pests common in the southeastern U.S., Baldwin said.

Each species is shown in a color photo and actual-size silhouette. The images are accompanied by text that includes common and scientific names, habitat, biology, behavior and distribution. Users can enlarge photos and activate links to related UF documents.

The idea came about more than a year ago, when Baldwin bought an iPhone and began browsing educational wildlife apps and soon realized there was almost nothing to help people identify pests.

After polling [pest-control](#) industry personnel Baldwin found there was significant interest in an iPhone app. So, with a grant from the Florida Cooperative Extension Service — the outreach arm of UF's agriculture program — she spent much of late 2009 and early 2010 developing iPest1.

Proceeds from iPest1 — which has sold close to 100 units since the

release in early May — will be used toward the development of additional apps in the iPest series.

Two more volumes will be available soon. One includes pest ants, stored food beetles, common structural termites and wood destroying insects. The other includes biting and stinging arthropods and bloodsucking arthropods.

Professionals have already begun using iPest1. Linda Prentice, a certified associate entomologist with BugOut Service, a northeast Florida-based pest control company, said she's had the app for two weeks and it's drawn interest from many colleagues.

"Everyone has been amazed," she said. "I came from a time in the industry when we didn't have this kind of education at your fingertips."

The app can also help pest control technicians educate customers about organisms found during inspections, said Allen Fugler Jr., executive vice president of the Orlando-based Florida Pest Management Association.

"I think the more professionalism and accurate information a pest control technician can provide, the better the relationship can be cemented," Fugler said.

Phil Koehler, a longtime UF entomology professor who assisted Baldwin with the text, said he believes iPest1 could change the way homeowners deal with pests, for one reason: convenience.

"The problem with print materials is, you don't always have them available where you see pests," Koehler said. "But people carry their cell phones."

Besides Koehler, iPest1 contributors included Roberto Pereira of the UF entomology department, student programmer Sudharsanan Sridharan and graphic artist Jane Medley.

Provided by University of Florida

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