



Managing Pests in Your Home

Essential strategies to prevent and eliminate pests

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All homeowners, at some point, will have to deal with unwanted guests. No, not the human kind. The creepy-crawly kind. Things that fly (birds, bats and bees), things that crawl and scurry (ants, cockroaches, bedbugs, mice, rats, squirrels and larger mammals) and even things that slither (snakes). Besides the ick factor, these unwanted guests can cause health problems for you and your family, as well as do damage to your home. Fur, dander and saliva from mice and rats are common triggers of allergies and asthma. Feces and guano from rodents, bats and birds can harbor bacteria and airborne pathogens. Unwanted animals can damage woodwork, plastic and other materials in a variety of ways. They can chew holes in your walls as well as your electrical wires, increasing the risk of system failure and fires. And they can seriously soil and ruin the integrity of your home's insulation in areas that you cannot easily see or reach.

Step 1. Keep the Pests Outdoors

Pests come indoors looking for shelter, food, water, places to nest and cache food and, yes, even a date. The first and best strategy a homeowner can use is to make your home inhospitable to these unwanted invaders.

What to do outdoors:

- Put a 12- to 24-inch strip of non-woody mulch (such as crushed rock) adjacent to your foundation.
- Trim any leafy plants, including trees, away from your foundation, walls and roof.
- Stuff cracks and possible entry points with copper mesh, then seal them with silicone caulk or spray foam.
- Clean out gutters regularly and drain any standing water away from the home.
- Install screens on your windows and over your chimney top.
- Move bird feeding stations at least 20 feet away from the house, and clean up uneaten bird seed and shells scattered on the ground.

What to do indoors:

- Keep your home clean and dry. Clean up water spills, crumbs and leftovers from kitchen countertops and storage shelves daily, and store foodstuffs in containers with lids and in closeable cabinets that you regularly inspect and clean.
- Remove trash as soon as the bag gets full. Place it in a sealed container (trash can or bin with a lid) outside your home.
- Regularly clean pet food bowls.
- Repair any leaky faucets or pipes.
- Inspect your home from the attic to the basement, looking for rodent droppings around baseboards, food storage areas and under sinks. Also look for evidence of chewing or nesting—shredded paper, fabric, wood and plastic—in drawers, boxes and storage spaces.



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Step 2. Eliminate Pests Without Chemicals or Pesticides

Before you consider other measures, use strategies that kill or trap pests *without* the use of chemicals or pesticides. Small rodents such as mice or rats can be trapped either in catch and release traps or snap traps that kill the animal quickly and humanely. Install one-way exit devices over entry points that allow bats, birds and squirrels to exit the building but don't let them back in. Vacuum up ant trails and other bugs frequently. Use jar traps, pheromone traps and nontoxic bait traps.

Step 3. Use Chemicals and Pesticides as a Last Resort

Exposure to chemicals can trigger anything from nausea, vomiting and headaches to more serious health concerns, such as lung damage, reproductive problems, and cancer. Pesticides are especially hazardous to children, whose developing bodies are more vulnerable to both temporary and permanent damage. But when your other efforts to control pests have failed and you have to use a chemical or pesticide, be sure to follow these tips:

- Properly match the product with the pest. For example, don't use bee spray for a rodent problem.
- Use sealed bait traps when possible, to prevent children and pets from accessing the poisonous bait inside it.
- Spot treat affected areas instead of spraying the entire home.
- ALWAYS follow the application instructions on the label for amounts to use, where to use it, and what personal protective gear may be needed during use (gloves, mask, safety goggles).
- Properly store any chemicals where children and pets can't access them. Call the Poison Control Center 1-800-222-1222 if you suspect an accidental poisoning.
- If you choose to hire a professional, make sure they are a Licensed Maine Pesticides Applicator.
- Do your homework. Use products with lower toxicities (Category IV on the Toxicity rating scale of I to IV).

For more information, check out these resources



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