

MESSENGER-INQUIRER



October 14, 2023

Inspect Kitchen, Pantry, and Holiday Decorations for Insect Pests

Watching for insect pests in the garden helps to prevent or reduce problems with them on plants. Inspecting food items in the pantry and cabinet avoids a widespread infestation of those products. The insect pests are lured to the kitchen because of the need for food, water, and places to hide. Also, insect pests hitchhike indoors on plant material used for fall and holiday decorations. Dr. Ric Bessin, University of Kentucky Extension Entomologist, describes the pests, explains where they like to hide, and how to avoid them.

A common pantry pest is the Indian meal moth. The adult moth is 0.5 inches long with pale gray and coppery brown front wings. The larval stage is a dirty white to pink caterpillar that is found crawling away from infested products to find a place to transform into an adult. The caterpillars can be found feeding on the surface of the product. They also produce silk webbing throughout the food source.

Other insect pests include several species of flour and grain beetles that infest dried grain products, dog food, and bird feed. From this group of beetles, the two commonly found are the cigarette and drugstore beetles, which infest almost any household food, spice, and leather

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articles. Cigarette beetle is commonly found in dried dog food and paprika. While the drugstore beetle is frequently found in bread, flour, meal, breakfast foods, and spices like red pepper. Drugstore beetles may be found in other areas in the home infesting wools, books, and museum items. The adult of both of these beetles fly and are attracted to light. The drugstore beetle is able to penetrate some types of packaging materials.

In responding to an infestation, determine which foods in the cabinet or pantry are likely to become infested. Packages that are open or partially used containing nuts, dried fruit, seeds, and grains are most likely the products. Early signs of infestation are small beetles crawling across the counter or shelf, or a small moth flying around in the kitchen or in the cupboard. With developing infestations, larvae may be found on countertops or walls in search of places to pupate.

Upon finding the insects, identify every product that has been colonized and throw them out. This includes every food item that is not stored in cans, jars, and sealable plastic containers, as well as pet and bird foods. Then check products in store-bought packaging such as cardboard, thin plastic containers, and other non-pest-proof packaging. Next, clean shelves and counters thoroughly, along with the cracks and crevices where food collects. Check under cans and other items and remove the pests. Doing a thorough job saves having to repeat the process.

Preventing new infestations is achieved by excluding the pests. Place individual stored food items into storage containers that are sealable to keep them out. This way, if an item is infested, it will not spread to other food items. Tight-fitting lids on glass and plastic containers

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keep the pests out. Also, proper storage and good sanitation practices are long-term practices to keep them out. Make sure that spills are cleaned up quickly.

Insects that can be pests of houseplants or become a nuisance may be brought inside on plant material used as decorations for fall and holidays. For example, greenery may be a source of aphids, mites, caterpillars, scale, whiteflies, and spiders.

Carefully inspect the plant material before bringing it inside. Start by looking at the leaves for signs of holes, indicating a chewing insect such as caterpillars. Flip the leaves over and watch for whiteflies, aphids, and spider mites. Examine the stems for scale insects. Finally, watch for honeydew and sooty mold on the leaves. These areas will be sticky to the touch. These signs usually indicate an active infestation of insect pests with piercing and sucking mouth parts. Avoid using these materials to minimize hitchhikers getting into the home.

Ornamental corn and corn shock displays are of low risk outdoors, however, indoors they may bring pests inside that could cause problems with pests in the pantry. Anguino grain moth and some grain beetles infest the corn in the field before harvest. Inspect the ears of corn carefully for signs of pests, such as holes in the kernels, before bringing them inside. After the holiday season, it is best to throw away these decorations instead of keeping them for the next year. They serve as a food source for grain pests and rodents while in storage.

For help with identifying pantry pests, place beetles in a container with white vinegar and bring them to the office. Moths should be placed in a container without the vinegar.

For more information on insect pests in the pantry and kitchen, contact the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Service at 270-685-8480 or annette.heisdorffer@uky.edu.

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Annette's Tips:

Succulents are popular plants. Many succulents are not cold hardy here. The plants from the genus *Sempervivum*, common name of hens-and chicks, and sedums are usually hardy outdoors. Otherwise, to be safe, treat the succulents as houseplants and bring them in for the winter.

Fall is the best time to fertilize the cool season grass, such as turf type tall fescue, in the lawn. A soil test indicates the fertilizer needed by the turfgrass. Soil testing saves time, money, and protects the environment. Instruction sheets and video on how to collect soil for the test is available at <https://daviess.ca.uky.edu/testing-identification> or by calling the office. For residents in Daviess County, the soil test is free thanks to a grant through the Daviess County Soil Conservation Service.

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