Pantry Pests

Fact Sheet FS1149

Cooperative Extension

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Several different types of insects and a mite may infest stored dry foods, pet foods, birdseed, and garden or lawn seeds. Most common are Indian meal moths (see FS1122 the Indian Meal Moth), rice weevils, and red flour beetles. Saw-toothed grain beetles, granary weevils, seed weevils, confused flour beetles, lesser grain borers and mites are less often identified. Most pantry pests have four stage life cycles: egg, larva, pupa and adult. The adults seldom feed: however, the larvae (worm-like grubs or caterpillars) are voracious feeders. Pupae may be found where feeding occurs or the larvae may crawl along shelves and walls seeking a place to pupate. Upon emergence, the adults mate and females lay eggs. There may be one to several generations each year, depending on the temperature and species. They may first be noticed as moths flying near the food storage area, as webbing in food containers, or as larvae or adults in stored foods.

The treatment is similar, no matter what insect infests the stored foods. Since cereals, spices, herbs, dried fruits, candy, garden seeds, and birdseed or dry pet foods may be infected, all food and feed packages must be inspected. If infested, all packages should be removed from the food storage area and the shelves, sides, and ceilings, cracks and crevices vacuumed and then washed. Infected packages can be discarded, or heated for ½ hour at 140°F, or placed in a freezer for three or four days at 0°F or below to kill eggs, larvae, pupae and adults. Packages should be isolated in canisters with tight lids or placed in glass or plastic jars with lids until the insects are gone. It may be necessary to repeat this procedure several times before the problem is solved. Traps and sprays are available to treat infestations in storage areas, but thorough and repeated cleaning is usually sufficient to eliminate the insects if all infected food containers have been removed. Be sure to follow instructions exactly and allow shelves to dry before replacing items.



These insects most often enter our food supply in warehouses. Some can chew through packages. Reinfestation is most often due to insects hiding in cracks and crevices during the cleaning process and then emerging to invade new packages. Sanitation is more effective than pesticides in controlling these pests in the home.

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