

How To Control Pests in Your Home

By Catherine Post

Pest—how is this unwholesome word defined? The Merriam-Webster Dictionary tells us that a pest is “a plant or animal detrimental to humans.” Its second definition implies “a nuisance.” If you’re a homeowner, a landowner, a gardener, or even an apartment dweller, you’ve undoubtedly come into contact with a variety of pests. (Please note, we don’t mean to imply that your landlord, children, or spouse are pests—these pests we’re referencing are all considerably smaller!) However pesky, whether bugs, rodents or beyond, there are a variety of ways to rid your home or yard from pests.

The most common indoor pest problems are termites, ants, and small rodents. Termites and certain ants—most often carpenter ants—can cause structural damage to your home, as they actually eat into wood. Common ants don’t pose that kind of risk, but are a nuisance as well as a health concern. And rodents—typically mice or rats—are unhealthy, inconvenient, and potentially dangerous.

It’s important to first recognize that you have such pests. Signs of termites or carpenter ants include damaged wood or wood shavings. Next, it’s imperative to identify the pest by obtaining wings or bodies of dead bugs. Identification will help you take the best approach to pest eradication. Contact the local branch of your state’s agricultural agency through your city or county services or the nearest university. They will usually be able to identify the creature for you. Some states offer this service free of charge, and will even mail you a container for shipping the pest to them.

Regular ants will show themselves plainly. They most often congregate in the kitchen or bathroom, and are attracted to sugar or any food residual. Ants are also attracted to dampness. Some homeowners or apartment dwellers have occasionally mistaken ants for mildew. The ants congregate so closely that from a slight distance they give the illusion of a large area of mildew growing on the wall, floor, or ceiling.

Signs of rodents include droppings, holes in boxes of food, and chewed wires. Rodents not only take up residence in cellars or attics, they are completely at home in your main living quarters. They are among the least pleasant of household pests, but at least are large enough to be trapped and released into the wild if you are opposed to poisons and chemicals. Just be sure to release them a long distance from your home (as in miles away) or the little critters will find their way back inside in almost no time.

Recent trends toward organic growing and natural garden fertilization have prompted many families to investigate the nature of certain chemicals used in their homes. Among such chemicals are those used for pest removal. Natural pest control is becoming an increasingly popular approach.

There are two major types of natural pest control. The first option is dusting. Some natural dusts include pyrethrum, boric acid, and silica sand. Check with your local farm supply or seed store. If they don't carry these products, they should know where to find them. It may also be worth your time to check with national chains like Home Depot.

The second option for natural pest control is spraying. Available for spraying are a boric acid formula plus formulas that use all natural oils, including orange, lemon, cinnamon, pennyroyal, citronella, oregano, and tea tree oils. Again, check with your farm supply store or seed store. Drug stores and health food or naturopathic stores often carry these oils as well. If not, the health or naturopathic vendors will know where you can find them.

In the case of some pests—especially ants—chemicals used on your lawn are the cause of their infestation. If you have been using chemical fertilizers or herbicides in your yard, you may in fact be driving these pests inside. Consider natural options for fertilizer or lawn and garden treatment if this is occurring.

For outside pests, you can use biological remedies for natural pest control. By increasing the predators of certain pests, you can keep pests away from your lawn and garden

naturally. Sound confusing? It really is just a simple example of the predator/prey relationship. For example, bluebirds eat many insects that cause damage to trees and gardens. A ladybird beetle eats small, soft insects that feed on fruits and crops. And garden spiders eat insects with wings by catching them in their sticky webs. Many professional fruit growers commonly use such methods for pest control. Consult your nearest agricultural expert and ask for their recommendations on how best to attract favorable predators.

The remaining method of pest control is through the use of spraying chemicals that destroy the pests, their eggs, and/or their nests. Chemicals may be purchased for use by the homeowner, or a professional may be consulted. There are more disadvantages with chemical pest control than there are with natural options. Chemicals have been known to contaminate food and water. They often are dangerous to pets and small children. They do, however, hold the record for being the most immediate and economical means of ridding your home, lawn, and garden of unwanted pests.

Weigh the odds carefully. Obviously pests must be removed for a variety of financial, health and nuisance reasons. If you don't have pets or toddlers, the risks of chemical pest controls are minimal. If you do have children and pets, it may be best to consider natural options instead.

Once pests are removed, there are both chemical and natural solutions for preventing a recurrence of infestation. The easiest and most economical is to check and seal your home against cracks, holes, and separations that may have allowed the pests inside in the first place. Prevention is always the best solution.