

Holidays will be here soon and that means house guests might be coming. Take a few steps now to make sure your 'guests' are the ones you want at your house, not the furry, unwelcome kind.

House mice are common guests once the outdoor temperatures drop. These small light gray, furry rodents have large ears and long tail. Their preferred food is grains, but they will munch on just about anything. One reason mice can be a problem once inside is due to their rapid ability to reproduce. Each year, a female mouse can produce 5-10 litters, with about 5-6 young per litter. Mice make nests out of materials like paper, feathers, or other fluffy materials.

Understanding how mice function helps in the control process. They have relatively poor eyesight and are near-sighted. To make up for this deficit, they utilize their whiskers to feel the walls as they move around. Mice also have extreme physical abilities. They can climb up vertical surfaces, balance along wire cables, jump 10" high or across a 3' gap, and survive a 9' drop. Their most impressive feat is being able to squeeze their bodies into holes 1/4" in diameter, the size of a pencil.

If you don't want these guests over for the holidays, there are several methods that can be used for controlling mice in the home. Exclusion is the most common in the fight against house mice. Prevent mice from entering buildings by eliminating openings that are 1/4" or larger. Use sealants or mortar to help fill the gaps. Spray-in-place foams and steel wool pads will fill the gaps, but they won't do much to stop mice from entering. Make sure doors, windows and screens fit tightly. Cover the edges of doors and windows with metal to prevent gnawing.

Population reduction is the last method for controlling mice. Traps and baits are two common population reduction methods. To ensure success with traps, you need to use a sufficient number of traps in areas where mice are living. Snap traps or multiple-capture traps can be used to capture mice. Double setting snap traps, placing two traps close to each other, will yield the best results in situations with high activity. Multi-catch traps can catch several mice at a time without resetting. Glue boards are another alternative to traps. These sticky boards catch and hold mice as they try to move throughout the home. Be sure to use sticky boards in locations where non-target animals or items won't get stuck in them. If this does happen, use an oily material, like vegetable or mineral oil, to dissolve the sticky substance. To make the traps more appealing you can apply a food source such as peanut butter or a chocolate chip melted to the trigger or you can secure a cloth scented with a food source to the traps' trigger.

Baits are another population reduction method. Be sure to read and follow all directions on baits. When choosing baits, consider the location and method of applications and any non-target pets and children. Choose the type of bait for your specific location and application. Mice have been known to move pelleted baits without eating them. Just because you have an empty box, doesn't mean they have eaten the bait. Bait stations or bait blocks ensure that the critter actually ate the bait.

Use caution when cleaning up droppings, nests, or mouse carcasses. This can help to decrease the potential spread of diseases carried by mice like Hantavirus. Use protective waterproof gloves and spray the carcass and trap or nest with a household disinfectant or a 10% bleach solution. Use a sealable bag turned inside out to pick up the mouse. To remove feces or urine, spray the area with a disinfectant until wet and wipe up with a towel, rag or mop. Don't use the vacuum or broom to collect dry feces as that can cause the material to go into the air and be inhaled.

We all want guests over for the holidays, but with a little work upfront, you can make sure the guests that enter your home will be welcome ones.

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