

Have you ever gotten something out of the cupboard only to find moths, webbing, or caterpillars inside? If so, you are not alone. Pantry pests seem to pop up out of nowhere in stored food goods. Find out what the common pests are and what you can do about them.

Pantry pests can include several different types of insects. The one thing that all these pests have in common is that they infest stored food or pantry items. They often go unnoticed until they emerge from the stored product. Grain weevils, Indian meal moths along with flour, dermestid, and carpet beetles can all be pests in stored foods.

Proper identification is key to knowing what control measures you need to take to get an infestation under control. Flour beetles have a reddish brown appearance and are just over 1/8" long. Just like the name implies, red or confused flour beetles are often found in flour and in other grains. Dermestid beetles commonly feed on animal-based products like dried meat or pet food and are often found in dark places. Indian meal moths are a widely common pantry pest. They feed on a wide range of products including grains, seeds, baked goods, and mixes. Food items that are infested by Indian meal moth will often have fine silk webbing and fecal pellets on or near the food surface. The 1/2" long, tan to copper colored, adult moths are often found in kitchens that have infested products.

The only way to get rid of a pantry pest infestation is to get rid of contaminated or infested food items and to properly store non-infested items. Common food products that can be infested by insects include:

- Flour, cereals and cake mixes.
- Crackers, cookies and chocolate.
- Nuts, dried beans, popcorn and rice.
- Powdered milk and creamers.
- Spices and tea.

If an infestation is suspected, all pantry items should be bagged and removed from the pantry. Items that appear to be un-infested can be stored in the freezer for at least four days to kill any possible insects or eggs. Infested items should be bagged and discarded. Shelves, cupboards, and other surfaces should be cleaned of any spilled products and thoroughly wipe down. Insecticides are not recommended for pantry pests.

Preventing re-infestation is another important step in the management process. Dried food items that could potentially be infested should be stored in air-tight, insect-proof containers. Food can also be stored in the refrigerator or freezer until the home is pest-free.

For more information about common pantry pests, Nebraska Extension publication, "Insect and Mite Pests in the Kitchen and Pantry" (EC3049), can be found at <https://go.unl.edu/pantrypests>.

With a little research and some elbow grease, you can keep your pantry pest free so you really can have your cake and eat it too.

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