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Preventing Unwanted House Guests

The weather has gotten cooler and many types of wildlife are preparing for winter. While we may have been enjoying the leaves changing colors and preparing for the coming holidays, wildlife has had other priorities. They have been busily working on storing food for the winter and/or looking for their winter homes. Different types of wildlife prepare for winter in different ways, some will migrate south to warmer weather, some will hibernate for the winter, and others will adapt to the change in weather. For smaller wildlife, such as rodents, looking for a winter home may result in them moving into houses, garages, grain storage facilities and machine shops.

A common unwanted house guest when the temperature gets cooler is the house mouse. House mice are described as small rodents that have small black eyes and relatively large ears. They are usually light gray with a cream belly and weigh about a half an ounce. Adult house mice are about five and a half to seven and a half inches long, including their tail. Effective mouse control involves sanitation, mouse-proof construction and population reduction. Be on the lookout for mouse activity and don't hesitate to start a mouse reduction process at the first sign of mice. Common signs of mice being active in an area are: droppings, fresh gnaw marks, tracks, and nests made of finely shredded paper or other fibrous materials. Other signs that mice are in a building include an ammonia-like smell and sounds of gnawing, squeaking, or climbing in walls and ceilings.

With the cooler weather, mice will be looking for warmer places to build their nests and easy access to food. Prevention is the best way to reduce the likelihood of mice moving into houses and buildings. Now is the time to check houses and other buildings for cracks and get them sealed. Mice can squeeze through cracks or holes that are a quarter of an inch wide. Cracks and holes can be temporarily be plugged with steel wool, but a more permanent fix of filling cracks with caulking or a barrier over the holes is the best way to prevent mice from coming through those spaces. After mouse proofing buildings, efforts to prevent and control mice should be focused on sanitation and population control. Sanitation to prevent mice includes the elimination of shelter that mice could use to hide, nest, and raise their young in. To remove shelter, keep garden areas picked up and free of access plant debris, and move firewood and scrap piles of wood or metal that give mice places to hide and build nests away from buildings.

In buildings, remove cabinet clutter and store supplies off of the ground. As well as removing shelter, it is important to remove food sources by removing pet food and bird seed or storing them in secure containers.

If after rodent proofing and sanitizing mice are still drawn to a building and find their way in, the next step to take is population control. Trapping is the preferred method of mouse population control in houses and other structures when there are only a few mice. Trapping provides visible results and does not require hazardous rodenticides. Dead mice can be removed, avoiding odors that can result when using poisons to control mice in buildings. Simple wooden snap traps can be found at most grocery or hardware stores and are inexpensive and effective. Newer style plastic traps that are designed to be set with one hand and allow disposing of the mouse without touching them are also available. Both styles of traps will need to be loaded with bait. Peanut butter, bacon, dried fruits, and seeds are bait options that are attractive to mice and easy to use. If baits are not successful at attracting mice, a cotton ball can be tied to the trigger to attract mice looking for nest material. When placing traps, place them in areas where there are signs of mice activity. Place traps next to walls, ideally behind objects and in a dark area, so mice will pass directly over the trigger. In garages and warehouses traps can also be set on ledges and pallets. If you do not want to use the traditional style of traps, another option is to use glue boards. However, do not place glue boards where desirable wildlife, children, and livestock can come into contact with them. Glue boards will not be as effective in dusty areas, unless covered, and in extreme temperatures as their tackiness will be reduced. And of course, cats are also an option for mouse control and population reduction.

As the weather continues to get colder the likelihood of mice coming into houses and other buildings will increase. To help prevent mice from moving into buildings it is important to rodent proof buildings by sealing all cracks and holes and reduce access to food and shelter by removing plant debris, storing firewood away from buildings, and removing or securely storing pet food and bird seed.

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