



NEWS RELEASE

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Insect Pests of Home-Stored Foods

Several insects commonly infest home-stored foods in California, such as grains, flour, nuts, spices, herbs and dried fruits. If infestations are prolonged, foods may be seriously damaged and may need to be discarded. Many people will discard food products that are even lightly infested by insects. These insects typically pose little health hazard, although some species, can produce irritation or allergic reactions.

More often, insects enter homes on food already infested during storage or transportation. When insects are first detected in food products, try to identify all sources of infestation in the home. Check all susceptible food items in cupboards. Pay particular attention to items that have not been used for a long time. Also check around areas of spilled foods.

If you know the identity of the insect, it will help you focus your search. The physical presence of the insects is the most obvious means of detecting areas of infestation. Also look for old case skins left by flour and carpet beetles. The presence of webbing is an easy means to detect items infested by some pests.

Items infested by insects that live within the food should immediately be discarded or temperature treated to kill the insects. To control with cold treatment, put infested items in a deep freeze for three to four days. For high temperature treatments, heat the oven between 133 and 140 degrees F for 20 minutes. Injury to the food is possible with excessively high temperature treatments.

Heat- or cold-treated objects can be re-infested. Keep them in the refrigerator or store them in tight-fitted containers until household infestations are eliminated. Because insects also can develop on spilled food, thoroughly clean areas where food is stored by vacuuming or sweeping all spilled food.

As a routine precaution, freezing can treat materials suspected of having insects after purchase. Purchase smaller amounts of food and use food products directly after purchase to prevent infestations from being established by insects brought in on the food.

Use of insecticides within pantry area is not generally recommended and normally will give little additional control in the absence of an aggressive sanitation program. Never apply insecticides in a manner that allows direct contact with food or food utensils.

Because of the diverse feed habits and mobility of pests such as cockroaches and carpet beetles, controls must take place over a larger area of the home. Always read and follow label directions when using pesticides. Only products labeled specifically for use around food storage areas may be used for controlling insect pests in stored products.

Source: <http://www.ext.colostate.edu/PUBS/insect/05501.html>, February 12, 2005