

Pantry Pests

Pantry pests are insects such as certain moths or beetles that can attack almost any kind of stored food, from spices to cereal to chocolate.

Pantry pests usually enter your home in an infested package of food. You might not notice these small insects until you see moths flying around your kitchen or beetles crawling in your food. Get rid of these pests by removing infested food, tightly sealing stored dry food, and thoroughly cleaning food storage areas.



Adult Indianmeal moth.

Jack Kelly Clark, UCIPM

Types of pantry pests and their damage:

- The Indianmeal moth is the most common moth found on food products in the home.
- Several species of beetles, including the warehouse beetle, sawtoothed grain beetle, red flour beetle, and cigarette beetle, commonly attack a variety of foods.
- Infested food can be contaminated with insect hairs, droppings, webbing, and secretions.
- Food contaminated with warehouse beetle hairs can irritate your mouth, throat, and digestive tract.
- Pantry pests can introduce microbes that rot food, especially in warm, humid conditions.

Detecting pantry pests.

- Adult moths or beetles are usually easier to spot than larvae.
- Inspect all packages, especially those that have been opened.
- Webbing in tight places of a package or tiny holes in a food container are signs of a pantry pest infestation.
- Use a pheromone trap labeled for pantry pests.
- By the time you spot a pantry pest, it has usually spread to other food packages.

For more information about managing pests, visit ipm.ucanr.edu or your local University of California Cooperative Extension office.

Preventing a pantry pest infestation

- Store food and bulk goods like pet food in containers with tight-fitting lids, not plastic bags.
- Keep certain infrequently used food like flours, spices, and grains in a freezer if possible.
- Wash old containers before filling them with new food.
- Don't mix old and new food together.
- Clean shelves, bins, and other food storage areas regularly.



Adult red flour beetle.

Cleaning up a pantry pest infestation.

- Throw away any food that has evidence of infestation.
- Vacuum corners and crevices of cupboards to get rid of insects or crumbs, and wash shelves with soap and water.
- Pantry pests can live for many weeks without food; continue using pheromone traps to detect pests after the source of the infestation has been removed.

What about pesticides?

- Insecticides are not recommended for controlling pantry pests.
- Spraying pesticides on or near food may cause greater harm to you and your family than would pantry pests.
- Even if you have a large infestation of pantry pests, removing infested material and following the guidelines above will provide effective control.

What you do in your home and landscape affects our water and health.

- Minimize the use of pesticides that pollute our waterways and harm human health.
- Use nonchemical alternatives or less toxic pesticide products whenever possible.
- Read product labels carefully and follow instructions on proper use, storage, and disposal.