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Is There a Mouse in Your House?

Description

Of all the mouse species that invade human structures, only the house mouse (*Mus musculus*) is likely to become a long term inhabitant. However, in our area, other species such as the White Footed Mouse and the Deer Mouse often abandon their outside habitats and take up residence in houses in the fall.

Distinguishing the House Mouse from Related Species

House Mouse	Related Species
Feet and head proportional to body; semi-naked tail as long as body and head combined.	Young Nowray or Roof Rat, *Rattus* spp.: head and feet large for body. Tail may be shorter than body and head combined.
Lacks distinct bi-colored tail; upper body brown or gray, feet and underside same color as back.	Deer Mouse or White Footed Mouse, *Peromyscus* spp.: bi-colored tail, white underside.
Body slender and smaller than vole, long tail, large ears and eyes in proportion to head.	Meadow Mouse or Vole, *Microtus* spp.: body plump, short hairy tail, small eyes and ears in proportion to head.
Flat, notched (not grooved) upper incisors.	

Habitat

The house mouse is found throughout the world. Deer mice and white footed mice inhabit wooded areas and thickets. Deer mice are also found on sandy beaches and farmlands. They construct their nests in stumps, under logs, in hollow tree cavities and even old bird nests.

Wild mice eat mainly nuts, seeds, berries, fruit and insects. In the home they will eat almost any food scraps. Mice are nibblers and tend to chew small holes in many places. They eat 15 to 20 meals a day and need little water. Mice damage food, clothing and documents by gnawing, nesting, urination and defecation.

Biology

Mice become sexually mature at two to three months old. They can produce three to six litters in a year with four to seven young per litter. Mice are loners. Males stake out territories that include a source of food, shelter and one or more females. Territories do not usually exceed ten feet in diameter.

Detecting Mice

Besides observation of mice scurrying about, mice can be identified by the following signs:

- Scratching sounds in walls, ceilings or cabinets.
- Shiny black or brown droppings, one eighth to one quarter inch in length.
- Smudge marks on pipes, beams and outside edges of holes.
- Urine stains that fluoresce under ultraviolet light.
- Gnaw marks and woodchips around baseboards, doors, cabinets, basements, closets or storage areas.
- Excited behavior of pets when they hear or see mice.

Management

Management strategies for wild mice and house mice are slightly different. If the mouse you see is a temporary invader, you should focus on trapping, exclusion and management of outdoor food and water sources close to the house. These include removal of fallen fruit or bird seed, wood and debris piles, and sacks of seed or pet food in storage. Compost heaps should be screened with hardware cloth to exclude animals. By contrast, management of the house mouse, which can live happily indoors without ever returning to the wild, must focus on food sources within the house and trapping.

When it comes to managing mice, there is no magic bullet. Here are a few suggestions:

Caulk any entrance holes or fill them with putty or steel wool. Pay special attention to areas where utilities enter the house, vents, and around windows and doorways (especially garage doors). Field mice caught in a live trap may be released on your property far away from the house. Bait the trap with peanut butter, moist grain, corn, carrots, apples, cereal or nuts.

Snap-traps should be placed against the wall with the narrow, baited end facing the wall. If you are worried about exposing your child or pet to the trap, place the trap in a coffee can, lay it on its side with the lid on, cut a one inch diameter hole in the lid and place the can in the mice' line of travel. Dispose of trapped mice by emptying the can. Traps should be placed five to ten feet apart.

Bait boxes or other types of enclosed bait stations are available. They should be placed next to walls or along the line of travel. The boxes contain poisonous bait that may be fast-or slow-acting. The slow-acting, multiple dose types are safer to use but either type should be used with extreme caution if children or pets are in the home. Be aware that mice that eat these poisons may die in an inaccessible spot- within a wall, for instance- and may cause unpleasant odors and attract insects.

Less effective are sticky traps, placed in the line of travel to catch mice. Unless the mouse is drowned or destroyed quickly, it can be a torturous ordeal for the creature and unpleasant for you.

Ultrasonic devices that emit high-frequency sound waves are a temporary solution at best. They must be used in relatively empty rooms; as sound waves generally do not travel around furniture, boxes, or other items. Mice and other pest animals quickly become accustomed to the sounds.

If a mouse population grows despite your best efforts, or if a large population of mice is present, consider hiring a pest control operator who has experience in rodent management

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