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## Common Sense Pest Management

Today, many Rockland residents are justifiably concerned about the use and safety of pesticides in and around the home. No one can definitely claim that pesticides are safe. Many chemicals that are used in the home, including disinfectants, moth balls, flea and tick collars, no-pest strips and even mouthwash, are actually pesticides because they kill bacteria, fungi, insects and other pests or diseases that may threaten the health, safety or cleanliness of a family and its home.



Some people prefer to tolerate pests found in and around the home, thereby avoiding the need for pesticides. Other people will not tolerate even one spider, fly or speck of mold in the home and will accumulate an arsenal of pesticides in an attempt to control the invaders. Cornell Cooperative Extension's goal is to help people learn to distinguish those creatures that can be tolerated from those that need to be managed. Proper treatment will be suggested if it is necessary, with pesticides as a last resort.

Animals and plants lived in Rockland County long before people arrived. Humans have since taken over the land, built cities and destroyed natural resources and habitats. We have also created habitats where highly adaptable wild species, such as deer, geese and woodchucks thrive - to the point they have become pests. People can learn to respect and live in harmony with animals and insects that do not cause harm. Snakes, birds, spiders and predatory insects, for example, are beneficial creatures in the landscape; they eat insects and would rather run from a person than bite. There is no reason to annihilate every unfamiliar creature that enters the home or yard.

Cornell Cooperative Extension can help you learn to identify and manage creatures that do need to be addressed. In some cases, pesticides are not appropriate or legal; with cultural methods and good housekeeping practices, you can keep these pests to a minimum. If you **must** resort to the use of pesticides, contact the Cornell Cooperative Extension diagnostic lab to discuss the least toxic pesticides that will get the job done.

### Indoor Pest Management

During the year, many creatures will try to make **your** home **their** home. Small animals such as squirrels, raccoons, birds, mice and snakes in search of warmth or a nesting place will enter homes through small openings. Chemical pesticide management of these invaders is neither feasible nor, in most cases, legal.

There are many ways to exclude unwanted animals from entering your home. Screen vent openings, locate and seal spaces at ground level and in eaves and attics where creatures may enter. Replace worn weather stripping. Remove brush piles and food sources from the yard. Animals may be trapped with live-animal traps and released in your yard. If you wish to have an animal removed from your property, you must hire a nuisance wildlife control agent, as it is illegal for homeowners to transport live animals from their property. To catch a snake in the house lay a damp towel on the floor. It will attempt to hide under the towel; quickly scoop it into a container and release it outdoors.

Insect pests in the home may generally be kept to a minimum by thorough house cleaning. Vacuum closets and carpets to minimize the dust that supports carpet beetle infestations. Store all dry foods and grains in airtight containers to discourage moths and grain beetles. Bathe your pets regularly and contact your veterinarian for methods of flea prevention.

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Bedbugs, carpenter ants and termites indoor pests that must be dealt with once they invade the home. Cornell Cooperative Extension's diagnostic lab can provide the latest information management of these insects.

Vacuum and caulk windows and doorsills to prevent spiders, flies and hibernating insects from entering the house. If they do get into the house, catch and release them outside or use a fly swatter.

## Outdoor Pest Management

### The Lawn

Test your soil for pH and if necessary, nutrients to determine your fertilizer needs. If you fertilize, one application yearly should be adequate – focus on fall application (about two weeks after your last mowing). You may fertilize high maintenance turf in early September and late May. Rockland County law prohibits the application of lawn fertilizer between December 1 and April 1. Use slow-release products.

- Reduce water stress with appropriate watering practices (when permitted by law); water deeply but infrequently, early in the day. Evening watering will encourage disease organisms.
- Mow the lawn no shorter than three inches. Leave short clippings on the lawn (they do not cause thatch).
- Contact Cornell Cooperative Extension's diagnostic lab for more lawn care tips or check out Cornell's home gardening lawn care web site at <http://www.explore.cornell.edu/>

### The Flower and Vegetable Garden

Proper site selection and healthy, well-drained soil are the keys to a successful garden. Test your soil pH and prepare it by adding appropriate organic matter such as compost before planting. Fertilize only as necessary. Select vegetable and ornamental varieties that are disease resistant. A list of vegetable varieties resistant to our most common diseases is available at the Cornell Cooperative Extension diagnostic lab or at <http://www.gardening.cornell.edu/>.

If you do not use herbicides on your lawn and pick up your clippings after mowing, you may spread the grass clippings in a one to two-inch deep layer across the garden beds to act as a mulch. This will conserve water and prevent weeds from sprouting. Straw, salt hay, newspaper, cocoa bean hulls, aged woodchips and even indoor/outdoor carpeting (on paths) may also be used.

Water your plants early in the day and avoid wetting the foliage. Proper air circulation around plants and rotation of crops each year will prevent attacks by many pests. The Cornell Cooperative Extension diagnostic lab can provide you with many garden ideas throughout the year.

Provide bird feeders and nesting boxes to encourage birds to visit the yard and feed on insect pests. You can trap aphids, white flies and many other small flying insect pests by coating yellow coffee can tops with petroleum jelly and tacking them to two-foot tall stakes among vegetables and flowers. The yellow color attracts these insects, which then get caught in the sticky coating. Japanese beetles and other large insects may be squashed by hand or knocked into a jar of soapy water as observed. Slugs may be captured with shallow pans of beer left in the garden, or baited with non-toxic bait.

Proper cultural practices in planting, fertilizing, watering and pruning will discourage stress-related diseases and insects. Trees and shrubs with identified small sucking insects that recur year after year may benefit from an early spring application of horticultural oil. This relatively harmless oil, sprayed before the buds emerge in spring, will smother most of the insects that overwinter and may reduce the need for insecticidal sprays later in the season.

Pesticides may perform a useful role in protecting people, homes, clothing and food from costly damage and sometimes unsafe conditions—if used correctly, judiciously and—as a last resort.

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*The information on pest management for New York State contained in this publication is dated April 2011. The user is responsible for obtaining the most up-to-date pest management information. Contact any Cornell Cooperative Extension county office or PMEP (<http://pmep.cce.cornell.edu/>), the Cornell Cooperative Extension pesticide information website. The information herein is no substitute for pesticide labeling. The user is solely responsible for reading and following manufacturer's labeling and instructions.*