

PESTS – some like both indoors & outdoors © 2006, revised 2012

Most of us try to minimise the amount of insecticides we use in the garden, preferring to tolerate a bit of damage to some plants, or ignore the wasp's nest on the fence or the ant's nest up the back. But then some of them have the nerve to invade the house. Outrageous! Even worse, some may want to stay indoors and start their family there.

There are a number of reasons some become pests indoors. They like the same living conditions we do – steady temperature and humidity and protection from the worst of the elements. And then we accidentally supply them with food and water. Almost as often, however, it is to no real good to themselves, they are attracted indoors for one reason or another when they would have been better off staying outside.

In this article I will run through the main culprits, why they are inside and a better understanding of how they operate, all of which will help you get the best possible control in the safest way.

Portuguese millipedes are now a well-established pest. Like their native cousins, they feed on organic matter in soils. You rarely see them unless digging or disturbing mulch in the garden. But when the first winter rains arrive, so do they arrive in numbers at your doorstep! The worst times are autumn and again in the spring. They are not reproductive until they are nearly two years old, but they can lay 200 eggs each. So while you may only see a few one year and maybe a few dozen the next, after three or four years there will be literally thousands of them.

They invade homes because they are attracted to light, so the first step is to avoid leaving lights on, particularly in the wet areas of the house. They will enter under doors and around plumbing including floor drains, and surface sprays will have some affect.

The main control is out in the garden where barrier applications of Derris dust once or twice a year will have immense results. Non-chemical control includes burying a large dish or bowl to ground level, half fill it with water and hang a light over it. They will be attracted there and fall in and drown. What ever you do, keep at it every year or they will return in numbers. However, there is a natural parasitic nematode that after a few years may gradually build up and keep the millipedes down to tolerable levels. But don't become complacent if this does happens – keep an eye on them and re-introduce the control measures when and if necessary.

Ants can be a real nuisance, and unfortunately there is no one control for all species. A few may nest in the home and need to be eradicated, but most need soil to nest in and thus need to be controlled there. So you must find out what species of ant it is before knowing the best control method. Send in a sample to the Department of Agriculture. Having said that, most modern surface sprays have reasonable to good effect, even if it is just biting at the edges.

We often get asked how to control ants because they are damaging plants or the lawn. If the plants are looking stressed and there are plenty of ants about, it is usually because the soil dry, compacted, crusted or water repellent, giving the ants ideal structural soil to nest in and the plants are actually suffering from drought stress.

White cedar moth, or Tussock moth, is a pest of the White cedar tree (often call Cape lilacs), and can build up into huge numbers. Being sensitive to sunlight, they come down from the trees at dawn and invade homes, cars or any protected area. Many people can suffer varying degrees of skin reaction the caterpillar's hairs. The best control is to wrap some hessian, shade cloth or even old carpet around the trunk of the tree and liberally sprinkle Derris dust all over it. As the caterpillars crawl up or down the trunk they will collect under the material and be killed. If you don't like using that chemical, you will need to go out to the tree at least every second morning, unroll the material and kill the caterpillars with your preferred method.



Banding a Cape lilac tree with shade cloth and Derris dust to control White cedar moth

Cockroaches are a dirty nuisance and the two species that give us most trouble are exotic, not native, so deserve no sympathy at all. The large brown American cockroach also breeds in septic tanks and leach drains, so you must treat outside as well as inside the house at least twice per year. Cockroach baits work well, though only smaller critters can get in, so add some liquid ANT-RID® on the top the bait to kill the larger ones. Once again, surface sprays are good, but remember roaches can walk on the underside of shelves, etc, so make sure you spray the underside of sinks and troughs as well as all the plumbing around them.

Fleas, wrongly called sand fleas, are a nuisance inside. The surest long-term control is to treat the animals, including Moggy. Dogs will scratch and bite at the first flea, but cats usually don't show discomfort until they have a lot of fleas. For this reason many people only treat Muttley. Surface sprays inside help and outside residual insecticides such as Coopex® are great to treat areas where pets lie and the fleas burrow in the soil below.

OTHER POTENTIAL PESTS:

Marauding males! The young males of a couple of species of spiders and scorpions often emerge from their nest or burrow in the autumn to breed. Full of adolescent energy and aggressiveness but no common sense (gee, sounds like teenage humans!), they go seeking a mate and may find themselves inside the house. Kill them if you wish, but if you're game enough catch them and return them to the outdoors.

Bugged by beetles? There are a number of beetles, which could live quite happily outside but may be attracted to come inside or get blown in by the wind. Some, such as the Museum beetle, can survive and breed indoors very successfully. Surface sprays, both interior and exterior, are our only weapon. Closely monitor collections of old clothes and fluffy toys.

Slaters, or Wood lice, friends to many but foes to equally as many, can venture into the home where there is most rotting timber such as kitchen or laundry cupboards, window frames and so on. They can also attack moist carpet, usually along the skirting. While surface sprays may have an effect, treating the cause of the problem is the best solution.

Mosquitoes and Midges can both breed out in the garden if it is always a bit too moist. Mosquitoes can even breed in the water in pot saucers and bases if they don't dry out between waterings. Electric insect zappers have some effect if kept spotlessly clean. Widespread, persistent problems are something you should contact your local government or state health department about.

Home Pest Control

There are easy, cost effective and relatively safe treatments to help get on top of these pests that you can do twice a year (once in autumn and again spring):

- 1) Use a cobweb broom to clean ceiling cornices and door & window architraves. Carefully vacuum bottoms of cupboards and around skirtings, especially where there is carpet (use a small nozzle head).
- 2) Apply a quality surface spray to:
 - Internal and external plumbing, especially under sinks.
 - Around and under fridges, dishwashers, washing machines and clothes dryers these are areas of warmth, moisture and food source for many pests, cockroaches in particular.
 - Wall, ceiling and eave ventilators.
 - Along the skirting of all rooms, especially if you have woolen carpets.
 - The bottom shelves of cupboards / wardrobes.
 - The ceiling cornices of kitchens and pantries (for pantry moth, etc).
- 3) Outdoors, use residual surface sprays such as Coopex® where animals lie, around plumbing leading to septic and under the eaves and patios (this also reduce the fly problem). Put out cockroach baits and use garden dust products containing Rotenone (Derris dust) along the edges of areas where nuisance pests are known to be.

But please realise that all this will not replace the need for qualified pest control operators who are still needed from time to time, especially for serious pests such as termites. And for many people, getting these technicians in once or twice a year to do preventative treatments for spiders, etc, may be more practical.

Another thing to realise about pest control is that willy-nilly spraying is not the answer, nor is waiting until you see lots of the adult stage before treatment. The name of the game is breaking the life cycle of the pest, and this is usually best done when the juveniles are first hatching from the eggs.

A follow-up treatment a few weeks later may be needed if the infestation is severe. And the juveniles are much easier to kill than the adult. So getting a little knowledge on the life cycle of the particular pest is invaluable.