

Least Toxic Home Pest Management

One in a Series of "How-To's"...

For any pest problem, always try common sense, non-chemical methods before you turn to pesticides. Here is the best strategy to follow:

I. Know Your Pest

First identify the pest. Use picture guides from your local library, publications from your county extension office, or take specimens of the pest or evidence of its damage to your county extension agent. Find out key aspects of the pest's biology, such as its life cycle, habitat and food, water, and breeding requirements. Common pests in the home include:

- (1) wood-boring insects such as termites, carpenter ants and powder post beetles;
- (2) fabric and stored product insects such as clothes moths, carpet beetles, larder beetles, and grain moths and beetles;
- (3) pet-associated pests such as fleas and ticks and,
- (4) general opportunistic pest species such as cockroaches and rodents.



II. Formulate A Pest Management Strategy

The least toxic, most permanent, and potentially most effective tactics are those that involve the establishment and enforcement of good sanitation, proper maintenance of buildings, and the implementation of structural modifications that inhibit or deter pests.

III. Non-Chemical Actions

Good sanitation includes proper storage and disposal of garbage, removal of trash and clutter, and diligent cleaning of all food-contaminated surfaces.

- Maintenance actions to foil pests include repairing holes in walls and window screens and reducing moisture by repairing leaks, cleaning gutters, and maintaining good soil drainage.
- Structural modifications include caulking cracks and crevices, filling or screening spaces in walls around pipes and wires, adding weather-stripping to windows and doors, and adding vapor barriers beneath buildings.
- A wide variety of mechanical traps are available as another nonchemical pest management tactic (sticky traps for rodents and cockroaches, spring traps and live-capture traps for rodents, and bait stations for cockroaches).



IV. Low Toxicity Chemical Actions

If these tactics alone do not reduce pest problems to an acceptable level, low toxicity pesticides may have to be used. These include boric acid, silica aerogel, and diatomaceous earth - all effective against indoor crawling insects such as cockroaches, ants, silverfish, and termites. These materials are slower acting than conventional pesticides, but are highly effective and long lasting. Remember that all insecticides are poisons, so appropriate precautions should be taken during application, such as wearing goggles and filter masks and posting all treated areas.

For more information about least-toxic pest control, contact Beyond Pesticides.

Updated 2008: from Vol 7. No.5