

Keep Unwanted Summer Guests Away

June 17, 2009

Summer is a great time to entertain visiting friends and family. There are some guests, however, that you shouldn't allow into your home — pests such as ants, roaches, rats, and termites.

Pest infestations are more than a nuisance. It is important to protect your family from disease due to food contamination and allergens and your property from wood and foundation damage caused by ants, mice and termites.

The cost for a home owner to treat an existing pest problem averages more than \$1,000 — which doesn't include the cost to correct the damage that has already been done. Termites alone have been estimated to cause \$5 billion worth of damage in the U.S. every year, according to the National Pest Management Association.

Here are some steps you can take now to help keep your home pest-free for years to come.

Inside Your Home

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recommends a few things you can do inside your house to control future infestations:

- Starve them out — keep a tight lid on the trash and empty it often. Clean up spills immediately and store food such as cereal, flour and sugar in plastic containers rather than in their original packaging.
- Dry them out — some pests, such as cockroaches, can survive a long time without food, but need water more often to survive. To shut off their supply, be sure to fix leaky faucets, radiators, dishwashers, and washing machines immediately and empty flower pots and plant stands of excess water.
- Keep them out — seal cracks and openings along baseboards, behind sinks, and around pipes and windows. Repair holes in door and window screens.

Outside Your Home

Pests enter your home from the outside, so you will also need to prepare the exterior of your house to keep pests out:

- Look for cracks and holes on the outside of your home and seal them up. Be sure to include points where utility lines enter the house. Also address damage to the basement foundation and windows.
- Check your landscaping. Rake mulch away from the base of your home and keep it to a minimum to allow for adequate drainage. Trim back tree branches and bushes so they do not make contact with the house. Remove tree stumps from your yard.
- Keep firewood piles stacked outside of your home neat, away from the house and off the ground.
- Make sure basements and attics are well ventilated and dry.
- Head up to the roof to look for any rotted or decaying shingles.
- When you're looking at your roof, also check that your gutters are free of debris.

These simple steps now can save you a lot of headache and money down the road from these unwanted visitors.

You can find more information about pest-free protection on EPA's Web site at www.epa.org/pesticides.

For more home maintenance tips, contact your [local home builders association](#) or visit the National Association of Home Builders online at www.nahb.org/forconsumers.