

## **“Home Invaders”**

Over the past few weeks my wife has noticed a few spiders in and around our home. After I tried to explain that they were harmless and actually considered beneficial creatures, she quickly let me know that she didn't care and wanted them gone! It seems that she, like most folks, doesn't like species other than humans in her home no matter how beneficial or harmless they may be.

Even the most careful and clean homeowner will have an occasional pest infestation. In Tennessee, at least one of about forty common pests is found in every home at one time or another. So if you have the occasional lady beetle or spider, or even something larger like a mouse or bat, it might help to know you are not alone. It might help even more to know how to get rid of them.

The easiest way to control pests in the home is to prevent them from entering to start with. This includes removing access to food, water, and shelter through sanitation and exclusion. Most people know that leaky faucets and food crumbs are prime sources for pests. What you may not have considered are things you can do outside your home to discourage pests from entering.

Trimming branches away from the roof of your house will prevent ants and squirrels from gaining access. Leaves and other debris should be cleaned from the gutters and the down spout should empty into drainpipes so that water is conducted away from the house. Also, remove debris such as firewood, boards, and other clutter from the base of the house as these can harbor pests such as roaches, carpenter ants, and termites.

As cold weather arrives and certain insects look for places to overwinter, it would be useful to walk around the perimeter of your home and try to figure out potential entry points. Exclude pests with tight fitting doors, windows, and sealed walls. This may require adding a door sweep, weather stripping to windows, caulking openings in window frames, etc. Keep in mind that mice can enter openings that are only  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch so sealing cracks and crevices is critical. Also, consider switching to sodium vapor or yellow bug lights around the driveway and doorways as these are much less attractive to insects.

As mentioned before, some pest invasions may still occur despite these diligent efforts. A vacuum can be used to remove occasional invaders. A wet/dry vac with a soapy water solution may be more useful when pests are very abundant. Many types of traps are also available including glue traps that can be used for monitoring and controlling certain pests.

As a last resort, pesticides may be needed to supplement these other procedures. Be cautious when using pesticides around children or pets and try to pick formulations that will reduce exposure to humans such as baits and insect growth regulators. Insecticides for homeowners are often available in ready-to-use formulations such as aerosols. Read and follow all label directions to ensure the safety and effectiveness of any insecticide. Keep in mind that professional pest control companies have access to more effective active ingredients and formulations than homeowners, and their help should be sought for certain invaders such as termites, bed bugs, and brown recluse spiders.

Pests in the home can be a source of embarrassment and frustration to anyone. By practicing good sanitation, taking some time to pest proof your home, and regularly monitoring your property for invaders, you can solve most problems without pesticides or professionals. For University of Tennessee Extension recommendations for specific pests, visit our website at [smith.tennessee.edu](http://smith.tennessee.edu), or contact the office at 615-735-2900.