

unwanted visitors: how to deal with common household bug problems

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EVEN THE MOST HOSPITABLE PERSON DOESN'T WANT TO OPEN THEIR home to guests like termites, stink bugs, and roaches. At one time or another, however, most of us will have to deal with bothersome pests invading our personal space.

If you think you might have a bug problem in your home—or if you want to know how to prevent such problems from happening in the first place—here's what you need to know about six common creepy crawlers.

1. Termites

One of the telltale signs that termites are in the vicinity is their mud trails: hollow tubes of mud built by the insects to protect them as they travel to and from their food source.

"No other bugs do it quite like termites do," explained Andy Tay, regional manager with Orkin. He said you might also see swarms of termites when they are attempting to reproduce and establish a new colony.

While traditional barrier methods are still available to treat termite infestations, newer, more environmentally friendly treatments are

growing in popularity.

Tay said Orkin began using its Sentricon System—which is considered a sound environmental choice for termite colony elimination—about five years ago, and the feedback has been very positive.

"Customers love that we're doing something that's tested and proven to be safe with their family and pets," he said. "We're doing everything we can to keep the environment around homes as safe as possible."

The system is also more proactive than some traditional barrier methods in that it actively deals with termites in the soil outside people's homes, using only grams of its active ingredient to help control an entire termite colony.

In some cases, however, it can be more expensive than traditional methods and can also take more time to work.

Termite-damaged wood
inside a home.



Photos courtesy of Orkin



Far left: Installing Baitube™ device with Recruit® IV termite bait.

Left, top: Tamping the Sentricon® station into the ground.

Bottom, left: Sentricon® system installed and providing continuous protection.

“But both types of treatments are very effective when done properly,” Tay said.

While the treatments can last for some time, once you know termites are in your area, it’s a good idea to have your house checked regularly, especially since most companies offer checks at little to no cost.

There are also a few steps you can take to help reduce the odds of future termite activity in and around your home.

Tay recommends keeping moisture and drainage away from the foundation walls of your house, since termites thrive in a moist environment. You can also reduce their food supply, which includes old, dead wood and mulch.

Keep log piles at least 10 feet away from your house and consider using small stones or rubber tire mulch in place of traditional mulch directly against your home.

2. Ants

According to Gregory Pettis of Dominion Pest Control, the most common type of ants to find in Central Pennsylvania homes are odorous house ants, which are often very small.

“They don’t respond well to sprays,” Pettis explained, “so we encourage residents to use bait.”

The type of bait you use is important too; look for a transferable one so that the ant doesn’t simply eat it and die, but rather takes it back to share with the rest of the colony.

“Then you’ll have the domino effect,” Pettis said.

You can also work to prevent ant problems by not installing landscaping directly against your home. “If you have dense vegetation against your house, you are a candidate for odorous house ants,” Pettis said, because the ground underneath will be penetrated by rain but not sunlight—creating a tropical-like

“Sooner or later, most of us have to deal with some kind of unwanted insect visitor.”

Images courtesy of FMC Agricultural Solutions



The Verifi bedbug detector is the first device ever to provide up to 90 days of active detection, at which point its attractants can be replaced and detection can continue.

environment perfect for these ants.

If after a month or two the problem isn't resolved, it's time to call a professional, who has access to stronger products than what is available directly to homeowners.

3. Bedbugs

Bedbugs are a hot topic right now, which Pettis attributes partially to the fact that the pest-control industry is still catching up after certain categories of pesticides that got rid of bedbugs were eliminated for environmental reasons.

"Some of the tools that used to be used on bedbugs simply are not around anymore," he explained.

He emphasized that if you think you have a bedbug problem, skip the over-the-counter methods and go straight to a professional. Dealing with these insects effectively requires someone who is trained to know where to find them.

Additionally, Pettis said that no one is really immune to bedbugs.

"This is a not a rich, poor, clean, or dirty issue," he said. "It's a transportation issue."

Bedbugs can be transported from one location to another through surprising means, including students' backpacks or even luggage on a coach bus.

Dominion is one of the first pest-control companies offering a pretreatment that can actually prevent bedbugs from invading your space—giving you greater peace of mind when you go to sleep at night.

4. Roaches

Few pests cause us to shriek the way cockroaches do. And they can be difficult to control because a female roach only has to be impregnated once to be able to lay eggs for the rest of her life—often more than a million eggs in a lifetime.

"The ones you see aren't the problem," explained Pettis. "It's the ones you don't see. They populate so quickly."

One of the most effective products used by Dominion Pest Control on roaches is an insect growth regulator (IGR), a substance that actually inhibits young insects from completing metamorphosis and becoming full adults.

"It stifles the population," said Pettis.

When it comes to roaches, sanitation is key, as they are drawn to any place food or water lingers—like bathrooms or kitchens.

"If you're using a lot of baits yet you've left last night's dinner on the counter, you can't compete with that. They're going to go for the cookie crumbs," Pettis said.

He also suggested keeping your home cooler, as roaches love warm temperatures. Anything over 75 degrees is perfect for them.

5. Stink Bugs

If you've ever squished a stink bug, you know they are appropriately named. And while they probably won't be as bad this year as in 2010—when they were at their worst—Pettis believes they will be worse than last year.

The best way to shield your home from stink bugs is by blocking all points of entry. This means sealing up holes and repairing or replacing all screens—in windows, doors, vents, and exhaust fans. Pettis also warns against using window-mounted air conditioning units, as stink bugs can come right through them.

In terms of treating a stink bug problem, "we do recommend repellency types of products," explained Pettis.

But be sure to read the label for the reapplication time frame, as most over-the-counter products won't last more than a few weeks.

6. Kudzu Bug

While you may not have heard of the kudzu bug yet, you probably will soon. The bug, which is in the same family as stink bugs, is expected to be a big nuisance in the coming years.

Although kudzu bugs prefer to eat the kudzu plant—which isn't native to the U.S. but is plentiful in Southern states—they also enjoy soybeans, which are abundant all along the East Coast.

The biggest difference from stink bugs is that the kudzu bug can leave you dealing with more than a terrible odor—when they squirt, it can actually leave a blister or chemical burn on your skin. Therefore, professionals like

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Pettis don't recommend handling the bugs with your bare hands.

"We plan on using similar products to those we use on stink bugs," Pettis said. "But the question is, 'Are kudzu bugs resistant to those treatments?' We're not sure yet."

Sooner or later, most of us have to deal with some kind of unwanted insect visitor. While in some cases over-the-counter treatments are effective, it's always helpful to consult a professional who can help make—and keep—your home pest-free.)))

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