K-STATE Research and Extension | Wildcat District

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Controlling Unwanted House Guests

As the weather gets cooler, many types of wildlife are preparing for winter. While we may have been enjoying the leaves changing colors and preparing for the coming holidays, wildlife has been busily working on storing food for the winter or looking for their winter homes. Different types of wildlife prepare for winter in different ways, some will migrate south to warmer weather, some will hibernate for the winter, and others will adapt to the change in weather. For smaller wildlife, such as rodents, looking for a winter home may result in them moving into houses, garages, grain bins, and shops.

The house mouse is a common unwanted house guest when the temperature gets cooler. Effective mouse control involves sanitation, mouse-proof construction, and population reduction. Be on the lookout for mouse activity and don't hesitate to start a mouse reduction process at the first sign of mice. Common signs of mice being active in an area are droppings, fresh gnaw marks, tracks, and nests made of finely shredded paper or other fibrous materials. Other signs that mice are in a building include an ammonia-like smell and sounds of gnawing, squeaking, or climbing in walls and ceilings.

With the cooler weather, mice will be looking for warm places to build their nests and have easy access to food. Prevention is the best way to reduce the likelihood of mice moving into buildings. Now is the time to check buildings for cracks and get them sealed. Mice can squeeze through cracks or holes that are as small as a quarter of an inch wide. Cracks and holes can be temporarily plugged with steel wool, but the best way to prevent mice from coming through those spaces is a more permanent fix of filling cracks with caulking or placing a barrier over the holes.

After mouse-proofing buildings, efforts to prevent and control mice should be focused on sanitation and population control. Sanitation includes the elimination of shelter that mice could use to hide, nest, and raise their young. To remove shelter, keep garden areas picked up and free of excess plant debris, and move firewood and scrap piles of wood or metal that give mice places to hide and build nests away from buildings. In buildings, remove cabinet clutter and store

supplies off of the ground. As well as removing shelter, it is important to remove food sources by removing pet food and bird seed or storing them in secure containers.

If mice are still drawn to a building and find their way in after rodent proofing and sanitizing, the next step to take is population control. Trapping is the preferred method of mouse population control in houses and other structures when there are only a few mice. Trapping provides visible results and does not require hazardous rodenticides. Dead mice can be removed, avoiding odors that can result when using poisons to control mice in buildings. Simple wooden snap traps can be found at most grocery or hardware stores and are inexpensive and effective. Newer-style plastic traps that are designed to be set with one hand and allow disposal of the mouse without touching them are also available. Both styles of traps will need to be loaded with bait. Peanut butter, bacon, dried fruits, and seeds are bait options that are attractive to mice and easy to use. If baits are not successful at attracting mice, a cotton ball can be tied to the trigger to attract mice looking for nest material.

When placing traps, put them in areas with signs of mice activity. Place traps next to walls, ideally behind objects and in a dark area, so mice will pass directly over the trigger. In garages and warehouses, traps can also be set on ledges and pallets. If you do not want to use the traditional style of traps, another option is to use glue boards. However, do not place glue boards where desirable wildlife, children, and pets can come into contact with them. Glue boards will not be as effective in dusty areas unless covered, and in extreme temperatures, their tackiness will be reduced. And of course, cats are also an option for mouse control and population reduction.

As the weather continues to get colder the likelihood of mice coming in will increase. To help prevent mice from moving into buildings it is important to rodent-proof buildings by sealing all cracks and holes and reduce access to food and shelter by removing plant debris, storing firewood away from buildings, and removing or securely storing pet food and bird seed.

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