HOME AND GARDEN COLUMN

HOUSEHOLD PEST CONTROL

Ants, cockroaches, termites, oh my! Why are there so many insects and other pests in Florida? We can blame it on our beautiful subtropical climate. Many of us have moved to Florida for this wonderful weather, but didn't realize that these exasperating pests were part of the package, now did we?

The hot summers, mild winters, high humidity, ample rainfall (hopefully on its way), and flourishing vegetation of Florida provide for a pest paradise. Most pests live outdoors and as far as we are concerned, that is where they should stay. Sometimes, however, they venture their way into our homes looking for food, water, and shelter. This is when they become a problem and we must take control.

The most common household pests are ants, cockroaches, fleas, rats, mice, and termites. For most of us, the tolerance level for these pests in our homes is zero. Integrated Pest Management (IPM) holds the key to eliminating household pests. IPM means to prevent or suppress pests without damage to our health, the environment, and other living organisms. Chemicals are used only when necessary and then only the least toxic chemicals available for the situation should be used.

The three steps of IPM are prevention, identification, and control. Prevention is the first and the most essential step. Generally, pests move into our homes seeking food, water, and shelter. By eliminating these, you can prevent household pests.

Most pests love dark, damp areas where food is readily available. Keep areas dry and free of exposed foods, especially sugar-based foods. Opened food packages, including cereals and pasta, should be stored in tightly sealed containers or in the refrigerator. Reducing clutter, such as piled boxes, old carpeting, and paper, which all can provide a place for shelter, will help to prevent pests.

Eliminating entryways into your home can also prevent pest invasions. Caulk cracks and crevices, which may allow pests to enter. Trim trees and shrubs that touch your home's exterior. This vegetation can give insects and rodents a simple passageway into the structure of your home.

Identifying pests in your home early before they become established in large numbers can help to avoid larger pest problems in the future. Keep an eye out. If you don't see any pests, then no control is needed. If you see evidence of pests, such as droppings, gnawed paper, sawdust along baseboards, or the actual pest itself, then it is probably time to implement some type of control measure.

It is important to always get proper identification of the pest before applying control measures. If you are unsure of the pest, you can take a sample to the UF/IFAS Osceola County Extension office for free analysis. There are different control methods for different pests and you need to
make sure you employ the right one. For example, ants and termites look a lot alike, but require two very different eradication measures.

Indoor pest control needs to be effective, because of our zero threshold level of pests in the home, but it also has to be safe. Our home is a place where our family spends most of their time, so we do not want to use any toxic pesticides indoors.

Today, we can use many safe chemical and non-chemical pest control products in our homes. These include insect or rodent traps, insect growth regulators, bait stations, repellents, and low-toxicity chemical pesticides. Use pesticides in the home safely and only when needed. The most important thing to remember when using a pesticide indoors is to read the label. Always apply the pesticide according to the directions, making sure that it is labeled for indoor use and for the target pests you want to control. Also, do not over treat an area. More is not better when it comes to pesticides.

If a pest problem becomes too large to tackle yourself, call a professional who practices Integrated Pest Management. Either way, everyone should be aware of the safest, most effective, long-term control methods of household pests.

If you want more information on household pest control, attend the Household Pest Control seminars in July. Call (321) 697-3000 for the dates and times of the seminars. Until then, call the Osceola County Master Gardeners with your gardening and pest questions. They are available to take your calls Monday thru Friday from 10am to 2pm.

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