MOLD

Mold is in the air and in the news. Follow some common sense steps to reduce problems with mold inside your home.

Mold is everywhere. Mold and mildew are general terms for unwanted fungal growth. Though some fungi such as edible mushrooms are beneficial, molds may trigger allergies, or cause irritation of eyes, nose and throat in some people.

Mold fungi feed on organic materials such as leather, paper, oil, soap film, smoke, food or organic soil particles. They require moist conditions to grow but they don’t need light.

Molds reproduce by microscopic spores that spread in the wind like dust. When mold spores are present with the proper moisture, food source and temperature, it is not a matter of IF you will have a mold problem but WHEN.

Fungal spores are everywhere and it is hard to keep most surfaces clean to reduce a food source. Growth is generally best at the same temperatures we are most comfortable in so, the factor we need to try to manage is moisture, both liquid water and vapor in the form of humidity.

The optimal growth range for mildews is above 70% relative humidity which is typical outside during most of the year. You should maintain indoor relative humidity between 40 and 60% to minimize problems with many indoor air quality factors such as bacteria, mold, dust mites and volatile organic compounds such as formaldehyde.

Moisture enters our homes from outside as well as inside. Water gets in through leaky water pipes and drains, broken washing machine hoses, poorly installed flashing and gutters and condensation on single pane windows. Check washer hoses annually and replace old ones to avoid major water damage.

Homes should be maintained to keep the outer shell waterproof through routine painting or sealing. Finishes on the inside surface of outside walls must breathe to avoid condensation problems inside the wall so use high permeability paints such as latex not vinyl wallpaper.

There should be adequate slope to keep drainage water away from the house foundation. Don’t let sprinklers spray on the wall of the house and plant shrubs far enough from the building to let air circulate behind them. This will also be less inviting for termites.

Various indoor activities such as cooking, bathing and laundry generate water vapor and contribute to high humidity. Unvented fireplaces and heaters generate toxic carbon monoxide fumes as well as water vapor and increase humidity indoors.

Opening windows for natural ventilation can introduce several gallons of moisture per night along with the fresh air. Once it is inside, it takes time and energy and costs money to remove it.

How do you reduce moisture inside? Exhaust it or condition the air. Use the exhaust fan over the stove when cooking, in the bathroom when bathing and be sure the dryer vent and bathroom vents connect to the outside, not just into the attic.

Mold and mildew problems are often blamed on the air conditioning system. Air conditioning not only cools the air, but it removes moisture from the air, lowering indoor humidity levels. However, improperly sized air conditioners cause problems. If they are too big for the home square footage and don’t consider energy saving features, they do not run long enough to condense enough water vapor so it can be removed outside to lower the humidity indoors.
Bigger is not better in regards to air conditioning. Bigger units, meaning more tons, cost more in addition to doing a poor job of dehumidifying your home. It may cool quickly, but still result in mold and mildew if it does not hold the humidity below 60%.

Have your air conditioner serviced to be sure it is running efficiently, the condenser coils are dust free and that the condensate drain is kept clean and free flowing to let the water removed by the air conditioner drip outside at least one foot from the foundation of your home.

Louvered doors and wire shelves in closets allow for good air circulation and keep humidity from being trapped. If you have solid doors, you will want to leave them partially opened.

If you have mildew questions, call Osceola County Extension at 321-697-3000.

The public is invited to a program on Edible Landscapes on Wednesday May 14 at 1:30 p.m. at Osceola Heritage Park. Tom Wichman, former Orange County Extension agent and Florida Master Gardener Coordinator for the University of Florida will be presenting.

Build a rain barrel and be ready for our June rainy season when you attend the Rain Barrel Workshop on Friday, May 30th at 1:00 p.m. at Osceola Heritage Park. Prepayment of $20.00 for materials is required.

Both programs will be held at the Osceola County Extension Meeting Room. Call 321-697-3000 to pre-register.

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