

(revision date:2/27/2014)

Mites in stored foods

Use Integrated Pest Management (IPM) for successful pest management.

Biology

Several species of mites (Tyroglyphidae) can become pests of stored foods. They infest products such as flour, cereals, packaged baking mixes, dried fruits, and pet foods. Mites may also be found feeding on molds and organic debris such as that associated with bird or animal nests. Most of these mite species prefer moist areas and are commonly found in cracks and crevices near their food source. The mites are barely visible to the unaided eye, but may be present in such huge numbers that the surface of the infested material appears to move. A tan coating or pile of “mite dust” comprised of living and dead mites and their waste products may appear on surfaces under or near infested foods. Prolonged contact with mites can cause a skin irritation known as grocer’s itch. In addition to being pantry pests, mites may also be a problem in other food storage areas such as barns or outbuildings. They commonly infest moldy animal feed such as baled hay and stored grain products. The mites themselves are not considered a health hazard to animals feeding on the infested products. However, the molds the mites are feeding on may produce toxins which can poison animals that ingest the contaminated feed.

Management Options

Non-Chemical Management

- ~ Buy susceptible foods in small amounts and use them promptly.
- ~ Do not store susceptible products such as flour, baking mixes, cereals, animal feeds, etc., for long periods of time.
- ~ Food products should be stored in sealed containers with tight-fitting lids.
- ~ Improve air circulation among stored foods to reduce humidity and prevent mold growth.
- ~ Keep dry pet foods away from the general pantry area and store them in tightly-sealed containers.
- ~ Promptly discard any contaminated human or animal food products. Clean the storage area and examine remaining products for infestation.
- ~ Thoroughly clean food storage areas including shelves, cracks, and crevices where pests may hide. Clean up food debris and spills promptly.

Select non-chemical management options as your first choice!

Chemical Management

IMPORTANT: Visit Home and Garden Fact Sheets for more information on using pesticides

Pesticide use is not recommended in or near food preparation and storage areas. Do not spray foodstuffs. If a severe infestation is present and cannot be controlled by sanitation measures, consult a pest management professional for assistance.

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Images



~ Caption: Tyroglyphid mites
~ Photo by: Jenny Glass