

# Pestproof Your Home

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**A MOUSE** will enter your home via any opening it can find. It can jump a foot high and fit through a hole the size of a pencil.



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**I**NSECTS, RODENTS AND OTHER pests are not only repulsive but also can seriously damage your home's structure—and make your family sick. Here's how you can make it hard for these unwanted visitors to move in:

## Mice and Rats

**The problem:** Ground critters don't understand that your house is not part of their natural habitat. Once inside, they can chew on wires, eat through food stores, crawl into heating equipment and spread diseases like hantavirus, salmonella or Lyme disease.

**How they get in:** In search of food, water and shelter, ground inhabitants like mice and snakes will enter your home through any opening they can find.

**How to keep them out:** Move garbage cans away from the house and cover tightly to keep out raccoons. Fix leaking outdoor faucets. Fill any siding or foundation holes 1/4 inch or larger. (Use mortar on masonry cracks and plug larger holes with copper wool.) Cover dryer vents with a tightly woven metal mesh, such as hardware cloth.

Getting rid of mice and rats may be as simple as setting out traps or poison (keep both far from kids and pets). To stop a severe rat infestation, call an exterminator.

## Birds and Squirrels

**The problem:** Animals that get into your attic may build nests that block vents and flues. They also can tear up insulation, and their droppings can harbor disease.

**How they get in:** Many common house pests enter from above. Even bats can get up under the eaves of your house, into the attic through vents or down the chimney.

**How to keep them out:** Trim tree branches that can act as squirrel highways to your roof. Cover vents with hardware cloth. Install a chimney cap with a grille. Watch for birds landing at the eaves and clean out nests.

Have a pro trap squirrels, which can put up a fight. And hire a licensed control specialist to humanely drive bats away, because they're a protected species in most of the country.

## Termites

**The problem:** Termites cause \$5 billion worth of damage to U.S. homes annually. The common subterranean termite munches 24/7 on anything made of cellulose (wood, paper, fabric). A colony of Formosan termites—which are rampant in 10 states—can eat through an entire floor in two years.

**How to keep them out:** Most termites and carpenter ants like damp wood, so keep the framing dry. Clean gutters and make sure downspouts empty away from the foundation. Never store firewood against the house.

Drywood termites, a pest in the Gulf Coast and Southwest, don't eat wet wood. The only way to protect against them is to build with pressure-treated wood or lumber treated with borates, minerals with low toxicity.

Whichever termites you have, call a licensed professional to evaluate the problem. A pro may apply insecticides, inject wood with borates or fumigate the entire house. But, warns Cindy Mannes of the National Pest Management Association, beware of anyone who insists your termite problem can't wait. "There are people who will say your house will fall down unless they do something tomorrow," she says. "It's just not true. You have time."

Keeping pests at bay takes vigilance, but the extra effort will keep your family healthy and your home safe, sound and yours alone.