

FREE REPORT

Expert Tips to Bug-proof your home!

A step-by-step guide to making your home less attractive to unwanted guests, not including relatives.

St. Matthews

EXTERMINATING

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First, the bad news. Every home has bugs.

It's a fact of life on Earth. Your home or business, regardless of its age, cost or condition, is a haven for insects simply because it is built on the ground, has windows and doors, and offers food, water, heat and protection from the elements.

When you built or bought your home, you moved into the bugs' neighborhood—they didn't moved into yours. You've probably noticed how an abandoned property quickly returns to nature without daily care. The most visible signs are grass, weeds and trees overgrowing the place, but insects and small animals move in just as quickly and less obviously. Some may have always been there, kept at bay by chemicals, pets or other measures.

Of course, some buildings have more bugs than others, and it's not because they're dirty. Sanitation plays a key role in keeping down bug populations, but it's not the only factor. There's no doubt cluttered and dirty buildings will have bugs, but clean homes will as well.

One of the best ways to limit unwanted intrusions by insects, rodents, birds, squirrels and other pests is to deny them entry -- a procedure known as pest proofing. Many pests seek refuge in homes and other buildings in response to changes in weather, such as extended periods of rain or drought, or the onset of cooler temperatures in autumn. Taking steps to block their entry before they end up inside can greatly reduce the chances of future sightings.

There are only three ways insects and other household pests get into your home or place of business:

They fly in.

They crawl in.

You bring them in.

We know this because of a bonus from all the research done on the rising cost of energy and how to keep heating and cooling bills down.

Studies show that if you live in a home built in the last 20 years, you have a hole in your house bigger than a basketball. Added together, all the gaps, spaces, cracks and holes in your walls, windows, doors, vents and foundation would create a hole nearly a foot in diameter. If your home or building is 30, 40 or 50 years old or older, you can double or triple that figure.

According to a statewide poll of Kentucky householders, 93% expressed concern over finding insects within their home. More than half indicated that a single cockroach, cricket, or spider would prompt them to use a can of bug spray or call an exterminator.

Outlined here are several useful tips for pest proofing one's home or place of business. The good news is they will also conserve energy and increase the comfort level during summer and winter. Equipment and materials mentioned can be purchased at most home improvement or hardware stores. One tip before you start: dress for success. To do the job correctly, you will be going places the bugs go—or want to go—and that may mean crawling, climbing or reaching places you don't ordinarily go, and neither does your mop, dust rag or spray cleaner. Wear coveralls or overalls, a hat and gloves if possible. And if you're going into the attic, consider a mask.

- 1. Install door sweeps at the base of all exterior entry doors.** While lying on the floor, check for light filtering under doors. Gaps of 1/16 inch or less will permit entry of insects and spiders; 1/4 inch-wide gaps (the diameter of a pencil) are large enough for entry of mice; 1/2 inch gaps are adequate for rats. Pay particular attention to the bottom corners --this is often where rodents and insects enter.
- 2. Apply caulk** (see #3 below) along bottom outside edge and sides of door thresholds to exclude ants and other small insects. Garage doors should be fitted with a bottom seal constructed of rubber (vinyl seals poorly in cold weather). Gaps under sliding glass doors can be sealed by lining the bottom track with 1/2 to 3/4 inch-wide foam weatherstripping.
- 3. Seal utility openings.** All the wires and pipes that enter your home from outside are open invitations for insects, especially if the pipes or cables generate heat or moisture or lead to equipment or places that are warm and wet. This would include your dryer vent, cable or satellite TV wire, gas and electric meters, telephone wires, outdoor water faucets, exterior

lighting connections, outdoor electric sockets, air conditioning cables and pipes, and vents and pipes for furnaces and water heaters. Ants, roaches, bees, spiders, rodents use these like highways into your home. A high-quality caulk will fill most openings, but some may require expandable sealant (read the directions twice and plan on throwing away whatever you don't use in an open can).

4. **Caulk cracks around windows, doors, fascia boards, etc.** Use a good quality silicone or acrylic latex caulk. Although somewhat less flexible than pure silicone, latex- type caulks clean up easily with water and are paintable. Caulks that dry clear are often easier to use than pigmented caulks since they don't show mistakes.
5. **Buy a good caulking gun.** Features to look for include a back-off trigger to halt the flow of caulk when desired, a built-in "slicer" for cutting the tip off of new caulking tubes, and a nail for puncturing the seal within. (Hardware stores sell guns with these features for less than \$10.00.) Prior to sealing, cracks should be cleaned and any peeling caulk removed to aid adhesion. For a professional look, smooth the bead of caulk after application with a damp rag or a moistened finger.
6. **Repair gaps and tears in window and door screens.** Doing so will help reduce entry of flies, gnats, mosquitoes and midges during summer, and cluster flies, lady beetles, and other overwintering pests in early fall. Certain insects, in particular leafhoppers and hackberry psyllids, are small enough to fit through standard mesh window screen. The only way to deny entry to these tiny insects is to keep windows closed during periods of adult emergence.
7. **To keep out raccoons birds, bats, squirrels, mice and other rodents, install 1/4-inch wire mesh over attic, roof, and crawl space vents.** (They call it 'hardware cloth' at your home center or hardware store. Chicken wire, which is cheaper and easier to work with, won't do the job.) Be sure to buy band-aids, tin snips and either a staple gun or "u" shaped fasteners to secure the hardware cloth. And remember to wear gloves when cutting and installing it, because edges can be razor sharp.

8. While you're on the roof, check the flashing on all chimneys—this is where the brick, stone or wood surrounding the chimney meets your roof. The punishment your roof gets from rain, sleet, ice, snow, blazing sun and wind works against the flashing daily. If you find ANY gaps, get your caulk gun and fill them. Use the best caulk you can afford, color-coded to match your shingles or other roofing material, not to \$1.99 bright white stuff. The good stuff will last longer—probably not the five or 10 years claimed on the tube, and certainly not a 'lifetime' but it's so much better than the cheap stuff. You don't want to be doing this again next year. And if you don't already have them, invest in chimney caps. They keep out weather as well as pests. Be sure to measure the inside diameter of your chimney—most caps install by sliding in and have a lip that covers the outer edge. If you have any doubt, take a picture of the chimney opening with your cell phone. The hardware store guy will know what you need.

Take a Walk

A simple walk around the outside of your home can be eye-opening, especially if you're thinking like a bug.

Anywhere that unlike materials converge you want to pay close attention, like where wood siding comes in contact with your foundation. Or metal doors meeting brick or stucco. Or plastic siding running into framing lumber. Or glass meeting metal. The potential for bugs to waltz into your home at these junctions is enormous for two reasons—first, whenever two hard surfaces meet there are always gaps because they do not seal cleanly—their rigidity prevents them from meeting completely. Second, unlike materials expand and contract at different rates when heated and cooled by weather. So even if the builder caulked everything during construction, odds are changes in temperature and moisture since then have caused the materials to separate over time. Check for spaces and fill them with good caulk or expandable foam.

Those tree limbs dipping onto your roof and gutters? They're a no-brainer for anything that crawls, including squirrels, mice, rats and raccoons. Destructive insects that tire of noshing on hardwood will find the plywood and 2 by 4s just beneath your shingles a special treat. Trim the limbs enough so even when they're wet from rain they won't come in contact with the roof.

Next check the beautiful shrubs, ornamental trees and flowers that hide your foundation. If they touch your siding, you've created an interstate for bugs to travel quickly and safely into your home. Cut them back as needed, and then likewise push the mulch away from the foundation. Otherwise you're making it too easy for termites.

If you burn real wood in your fireplace, do yourself a favor and don't stack it against the house or within arms reach of the house. Firewood is the rapid transit system for beetles, worms, spiders and other boring, biting, chewing pests. You probably bring them in with each armload of wood you set on the hearth anyway, but keep them away from the house in the meantime.

Change your lifestyle

You may be a better host than you imagine. Without knowing it, you could be serving up banquets of food, condos of shelter and maternity wards of safety for the insects living in your home.

Crack down on your hospitality and you'll see a big difference.

- 1. Don't leave dirty dishes in the sink overnight.** It's like ringing the dinner bell for roaches and ants. And when you've done the dishes, don't walk away before the water has drained from the sink. Tap any food out of the strainer into the disposal and run it, or put it in the trash and take the trash out to the can.
- 2. Clean up spills and food scraps on your counters and floors.** Don't forget the crumbs under the toaster over. To a bug, they're not crumbs—they're carry-out..
- 3. Cover sugar bowls and candy dishes.** You don't want to know what goes on in them overnight. Same with nuts, especially the salty and sweet kinds.
- 4. f your stove or cook top has grease traps of any kind, check them regularly and clean them.**
- 5. Pick up pet food and store in a tight-fitting container.**
- 6. If you collect waste items in a "to be composted" container, be sure the lid fits tight.**

That's the easy stuff. Step two requires more effort, but really helps slam the door.

- 1. Transfer all the food in your pantry that's in open containers or cardboard boxes into jars with lids or other tight-fitting containers:** breakfast cereal, pasta, nuts, raisins, crackers, cookies, chips, Cheetos--all of it. Screw the lids on tight—ants learn quickly to follow the threads when dinner is at the end of the line.
- 2. Now do the same with all your baking supplies:** corn meal, flour, sugar, chocolate, coconut, etc. and don't overlook the pancake mix. Pay close attention as you pour the stuff into your new containers—you may want to throw some of your food away.
- 3. Do the same with dry pet foods, too.**

Shut down the DOT— the Department of Transportation.

You need to stop bringing pests into your home unknowingly.

- 1. When you bring home groceries, check the bags for bugs. Wash produce immediately, before putting it away.**
- 2. If you buy used clothing, furniture or books, check it carefully before bringing it into your home.**
- 3. When traveling, inspect your luggage upon your return,** before you come in the house, if possible. It's easy to bring home infestations from hotels, homes and vehicles you've been in.
- 4. If you buy plants, dirt and mulch from garden centers, remember most of the stuff comes from hot houses, nurseries, and volume suppliers.** It's easy to bring home a beautiful plant with pests on the leaves or in the soil or a load of mulch that includes snake eggs. If possible, check indoor plants thoroughly before you bring them inside. A bag of topsoil could have beetles, bees or flies inside. It is, after all,, dirt, so it's not going to be perfect. Just keep that in mind before you tear it open.