

8-08-14 Of Mice and Men

While I am not convinced there is a better enough mousetrap to trigger the world beating a path to anyone's door, many have been beating a path to my office with questions about getting rid of this year's abundant supply of rodents of all types, including mice and chipmunks. I try to pleasantly explain that it is all part of nature, with rodents enjoying the bumper crop of pine cones and acorns and hawks enjoying the increase in their food supply. But then we get down to business. People don't want mice in their house and they want to know how to get rid of them.

While you might need assistance from professional wildlife handlers and/or exterminators to rid your attic of bats or a nest of raccoons, you can generally save yourself a lot of money by handling a mouse problem yourself.

Begin by assessing the situation. And then start thinking like a mouse. Where are you seeing evidence? If you are seeing their tiny, slender pointed droppings in, say, your pantry or cupboard, look for evidence of chewed holes in boxes and bags. Wearing gloves, throw away all soft-sided packages. You can wash the cans. Save a little of their favorite foods. (They enjoy fatty and sweet foods as much as people, with vanilla, coconut and chocolate being favorite sweets and peanut butter, seeds and bacon being favorite fat foods.) Knowing their favorite snack is useful for later on when you are luring them to a trap.

Next, think about how they entered your house and arrived at the food source. They usually gain entry to the above ground part of your home by following pipes and conduits. These little pathways lead to your stove and sink and baseboard heaters through holes drilled in the wood. These should all be closed by stuffing them first with some steel wool or metal scrubbing pads, pulled apart into thin sections and pushed far into the hole with something very slender, such as tiny screw driver or sturdy wire. Then, seal the hole with spray foam insulation, after reading the directions, for it is very sticky stuff and expands far more than you think it will. It is applied with a straw that is attached to the spray can. You need to stick that straw into the hole and spray only a tiny bit of foam. At first it comes out shaped like the straw and it can pull away and move around, like a fatter version of "silly string" or "party string". You can be fooled into thinking you filled the hole when you later see this big chunk of hardened foam. You'll be very impressed with your work and not realize that behind the big lumps are little holes that weren't filled. When it has completely dried and hardened you can cut off the excess and see if there are any holes needed more. Silicone caulking is also a good alternative.

The stove is a favorite entry point but don't pull out your stove if it is a gas one, even if it has a flexible connection. Instead, go down cellar and find where the pipe leads up to it. Then use the same method for plugging that hole. While down cellar, look around for any evidence of droppings; areas where they might enter and food supplies that might attract them, such as pet food, grass seed or bird seed. Throw away damaged supplies and store the replaced food in containers with tight fitting lids.

Once the entry holes have been filled, you have to consider the possibility that you may have done such a great job, that there are now some mice stuck in your house. Now it is time to consider how to get rid of the unwanted guests. I am skipping right over the recommendation of many pest control companies, that of poisoning the mice. Oh, they might not call it that; the poison containers are usually referred to as bait stations. The bait is poison. Think about that. Who wants a poisoned mouse dying in their house, in some unknown location, where it will release its fleas and mites, and later giving off a putrid odor, attracting ants and flies?

It is preferable to have solid evidence of reducing/eliminating the population before trapping. If you decide to use a live trap, make sure you take them for a long ride into the country, away from other homes before releasing. Other traps involve cardboard covered in extremely sticky gel. They are very effective but not humane. The mouse slowly staves to death and will be still be alive when you have the duty of disposing it. If you choose to kill the mouse, the old fashioned spring-loaded trap works very well. Place those traps baited with some food perpendicular to the wall where you have found evidence. Place them in pairs so that if one does not work, the other will. Nesting material such as thread, shredded paper or pulled apart wool is also very attractive to mice. They love old cloth oven mitts; they smell like food and are soft like pillows.

It is unpleasant work, to be sure, this rodent ridding project, but it will be low cost compared to hiring someone and you will be getting rid of disease carrying animals.

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