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Controlling Unwanted House Guests

As the weather gets cooler many types of wildlife are preparing for winter. Different types of wildlife prepare for winter in different ways, some will migrate south to warmer weather, some will hibernate for the winter, and others will adapt to the change in weather. For smaller wildlife, such as mice, looking for a winter home may result in them moving into houses, garages, grain bins and shops.

Effective mouse control involves sanitation, mouse-proof construction and population reduction. Be on the lookout for mouse activity and don't hesitate to start a mouse reduction process at the first sign of mice. Common signs of mice being active in an area are droppings, fresh gnaw marks, tracks, and nests made of finely shredded paper or other fibrous materials. Other signs that mice are in a building include an ammonia-like smell and sounds of gnawing, squeaking, or climbing in walls and ceilings.

With the cooler weather, mice will be looking for warm places to build their nests and have easy access to food. Prevention is the best way to reduce the likelihood of mice moving into buildings. Check buildings for cracks and get them sealed, mice can squeeze through cracks or holes that are as small as a quarter of an inch wide. Cracks and holes can be temporarily plugged with steel wool, but a more permanent fix of filling cracks with caulking or a barrier over the holes is the best way to prevent mice from coming through those spaces. After mouse proofing buildings, efforts to prevent and control mice should be focused on sanitation and population control. Sanitation to prevent mice includes the elimination of shelter that mice could use to hide, nest, and raise their young in. To remove shelter, keep garden areas picked up and free of access plant debris, and move firewood and scrap piles of wood or metal that give mice places to hide and build nests away from buildings. In buildings, remove cabinet clutter and store supplies off of the ground. As well as removing shelter, it is important to remove food sources by removing pet food and bird seed or storing them in secure containers.

If after rodent proofing and sanitizing mice are still drawn to a building and find their way in the next step to take is population control. Trapping is the preferred method of mouse population control in houses and other structures when there are only a few mice. Trapping provides visible results and does not require rodenticides that can also be hazardous to animals that are not the intended target. Dead mice can be removed, avoiding odors that can result when

using poisons to control mice in buildings. Simple wooden snap traps can be found at most grocery or hardware stores and are inexpensive and effective. Newer style plastic traps that are designed to be set with one hand and allow disposing of the mouse without touching them are also available. Both styles of traps will need to be loaded with bait. Peanut butter, bacon, dried fruits, and seeds are bait options that are attractive to mice and easy to use. If baits are not successful at attracting mice, a cotton ball can be tied to the trigger to attract mice looking for nest material. When placing traps, place them in areas where there are signs of mice activity. Place traps next to walls, ideally behind objects and in a dark area, so mice will pass directly over the trigger. In garages and warehouses traps can also be set on ledges and pallets. If you do not want to use the traditional style of traps, another option is to use glue boards or a "bucket trap". However, do not place glue boards where desirable wildlife, children, and pets can come into contact with them. Glue boards will not be as effective in dusty areas, unless covered, and in extreme temperatures as their tackiness will be reduced. And of course, cats are also an option for mouse control and population reduction.

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