



Preventing Insects, Spiders and Other Pest Invaders from Entering Your Home

Dr. John D. Hopkins

When the weather begins to change in the fall and things get cooler, arthropod pests like the multi-colored Asian lady beetle, the boxelder bug, crickets, various stinkbugs, or spiders are just some

of the pest problems that homeowners may have to deal with. The first thing most people think of when trying to prevent a pest problem is **WHAT INSECTICIDE DO I SPRAY?**

However, there are other measures that should be taken that will help prevent these pests from entering your home and may even eliminate the need for an insecticide application. Pest proofing your home is the **BEST** way to prevent unwanted invaders at this time **or any other time of year.**

Your goal is to prevent pest entry and eliminate conditions that are conducive to pest infestation. Here are the ABC's of pest proofing your home:

A. Ensure that screens on doors and windows are properly installed and maintained. If you don't have screen doors on your home, install them. Any damaged screens should be repaired or replaced. Fine mesh screening will prevent all but the tiniest insects from entering your home.

B. Doors should seal properly. If air can pass through or light can be seen through cracks around doors then insects or spiders can get in. Install tight-fitting thresholds and door sweeps to the bottoms of exterior doors and use door seals to fill the gap around the sides and top of each door.

C. Cracks in the foundation, exterior walls, and fascia boards should be repaired. Arthropod invaders use these cracks in to gain entrance to your home. Carefully inspect the exterior of your home and use your favorite caulk or silicone sealant to fill any cracks that are found.

D. Gaps around utility lines entering the home and gaps around appliance vents should be eliminated. Just like cracks in the foundation, any gaps around dryer vents, gas lines, telephone lines, etc. should be filled. If gaps are too large for caulk, spray foam products may be helpful. Also, if holes are required for ventilation (weep holes in brick veneer) copper gauze may be used to block pest entry while still allowing for air flow. Steel wool is not recommended if conditions for rust exist.



E. Varmint-proof wire or metal mesh should be installed on attic vents and crawl space vents.

Rats, mice, bats, skunks, raccoons, squirrels, birds and a myriad of other creatures may make themselves at home in attics or crawl spaces if you don't install barriers to keep them out. These animals may carry fleas, mites, or create conditions favorable for other pests that may then infest your home.

F. Moisture sources should be eliminated by fixing any leaks. Most insect pests require a certain amount of humidity to survive and any source of moisture can be attractive to them. Promptly repair all plumbing leaks and remember, even condensation on pipes can drip and create conducive conditions for infestation. Make use of dehumidifiers if necessary. Basements or crawl spaces that flood during heavy rains should be equipped with a proper ventilation and drainage system.

G. Sanitation is extremely important so keep the kitchen clean. Where food and water is readily available, certain types of pests will make themselves at home. Make every effort to keep your kitchen clean. Wipe, sweep, and vacuum surfaces as required, and clean up spills immediately. Don't leave dirty dishes in the sink overnight. Toasters and microwave ovens should be cleaned out regularly and be sure to scrub down your stovetop daily. Properly dispose of food scraps and packaging.

H. Sealable containers should be used for food storage. Sealed storage containers not only prevent pest entry, but also prevent cross contamination of other food stuffs if the original product happened to be already infested. Items like cereals, grains, dry beans, rice, and other pantry items should be disposed of immediately upon first sign of infestation. Non-perishable items should be stored in air tight containers while perishables should be stored under refrigeration or frozen.

I. Eliminate clutter. Cluttered home environments provide easily accessible sites for pests to hide and harbor. Dirty laundry should be kept in clothes hampers and laundered promptly. Floors should be kept clear of belongings and items should be properly put away when no longer in use (preferably in sealable plastic storage containers. Recyclable items should be rinsed and recycled promptly. Beverage cans and bottles, milk jugs, pet food cans, etc. will all attract insects if they are not rinsed out thoroughly.

J. Clean up after your pets. Some pests like dry pet food so store your pet's food in an air tight container. Do not leave extra pet food exposed and accessible except at feeding time and clean your pet's food dishes regularly. Other pests like flies are attracted to pet waste so clean your cat's litter box daily. Also, wash pet bedding on a regular basis.

K. Frequent removal of household garbage is a necessity. Even before you can smell it, it is attractive to pests so remove household garbage often. Line waste bins with plastic garbage bags and secure the bags tightly before taking them to outdoor garbage containers. Outdoor containers should not be located near entryways and regular scheduled pick up and removal should be arranged.

L. Clean trash bins as needed. Sometimes plastic liners or garbage bags tear and spills occur inside garbage cans. At least several times a year, clean the inside of garbage containers with soap and water or a mild bleach solution to eliminate smells and sticky substances that may attract pests. As before, outdoor garbage containers should not be kept close to the house.

M. Do not allow trees and shrubs to contact the house. Trees and shrubs in contact with the roof or outside walls of your home can serve as a bridge to allow pests to gain access to your home. Keep shrubs and tree branches pruned away from the home.

If the above listed maintenance and sanitation guidelines are carried out, pests will be discouraged or prevented from invading in the first place.

However, if nuisance pests do get inside:

In large numbers,

1. They can be vacuumed up and the vacuum bag can be discarded outside.
2. Line vacuum hose with a stocking and insects will be conveniently bagged.
3. **NO INSECTICIDE RECOMMENDED!** If an insecticide is used, many insects will die in inaccessible places making clean up impossible and these dead insects will serve as a food source for other pest insects like dermestid beetles.

In low numbers or individually

1. Pests can be swept up and removed, or
2. Treated with an over the counter aerosol insecticide and removed.
3. Over the counter residual insecticides labeled for crack & crevice and/or surface treatment may also provide relief (Low numbers only)

The use of residual insecticides labeled for perimeter application can also help provide a barrier to prevent insect pest/spider entry.

Finally, pest proofing or preventing nuisance pests from gaining entry in the first place is the BEST strategy for stopping problem pests from invading your home whether it is in the fall or any other time of year.