

# Pantry and Fabric Pests in the Home

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Pantry and fabric pests are found occasionally in nearly every home. Although many of these pests are no more than an inconvenience, others can significantly damage food or personal items. These pests are not typically dangerous to your health, but they can be a nuisance. Strategies are available to help you manage infestations that develop in your home.

Some insects feed primarily on plant materials and are usually found in stored foods in kitchens and pantries. Other insects feed primarily on products containing animal proteins, such as hair, hides, feathers, leather, powdered milk, woolen fabrics, and some pet foods. Pests of animal products are more likely to infest closets and areas other than kitchens.

Food and fabric pests can be found almost anywhere in a home. If you repeatedly find the same kind of insect in a kitchen or closet, it is good evidence of a pest problem.

Food pests are often brought home accidentally from the grocery or pet store. Food can become infested in the farm or garden or during storage or transport. Although food manufacturers and grocery stores control most food pests with strict sanitation measures and the judicious use of pesticides, it is possible that a few insects will make their way into your home.

Although insects that feed on animal products may also enter your home from the grocery store, they are just as likely to enter from outdoors. Clothes

moths and carpet beetles live outdoors in bee, bird, and rodent nests. Carpet beetle adults often feed on ornamental shrubs and flowers and can easily enter the home.

## Pantry pests

Several insects infest foods, grains, seeds, spices, and other items commonly found in pantries.

**Cigarette and drugstore beetles** (Fig. 1). The larvae of these beetles feed on all kinds of plant material, including beans, flour, grains, nuts, seeds, spices, tobacco, pot-pourri, cottonseed meal, dried flower arrangements, and dried fruits and vegetables.

The adults are  $\frac{1}{10}$  to  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch long with cylindrical, brown to reddish brown bodies. From above, the head is not visible. These beetles are strong fliers and may be attracted to light fixtures and windows. The adults do not feed but do lay eggs on food sources.

**Merchant grain beetles and saw-toothed grain beetles** (Fig. 2) can infest birdseed, pasta, dried fruits, sunflower seeds, and cereal and flour products. The adults are brown, about  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch long, elongated, and flattened.

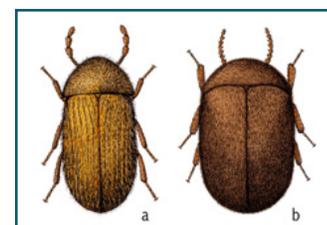


Figure 1. Drugstore (a) and cigarette beetle (b) adults (adapted from R. White, USDA)



Figure 2. Saw-toothed grain beetle adult (adapted from A.D. Cushman, USDA)

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