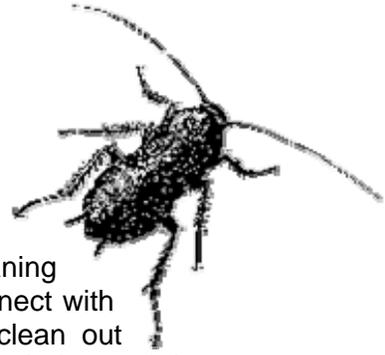


Food Facts Highlights:

Spring Clean to Eliminate Pantry Pests



Whether it's washing winter blankets or sweeping away cobwebs, spring cleaning can be challenging, and sometimes fun. For me, it means a chance to re-connect with all those boxes in the basement. Spring cleaning can also be a time to clean out cabinets and pantries and get rid of any bugs that have spent the winter hiding in bags of flour or boxes of dried pasta. Here are some tips to get you started:

Insect Pests of Stored Food

Insects infesting stored foods are one of the most common household insect problems. The many different kinds of insects that invade stored dried foods are often referred to as "pantry pests." They contaminate more food than they consume, and most people find the contaminated products unfit for consumption. Pantry pests are often discovered when they leave an infested food to crawl or fly about the house. They often accumulate in pots, pans or dishes or on window sills. Fortunately, they do not bite or sting people or pets nor do they feed on or damage the house structure or contents.

Nearly all dried food products are susceptible to insect infestation, including **cereal products** (flour, cake mix, cornmeal, rice, spaghetti, crackers, and cookies); **seeds** such as dried beans and popcorn; **nuts; chocolate; raisins** and **other dried fruits; spices; powdered milk; and cured meats.** **Non-food items** that may be infested include **birdseed, dry pet food, ornamental seed** and **dried plant displays, ornamental corn, dried flowers, garden seeds, potpourri, and rodent baits.**

A stored food product may become infested at the processing plant or warehouse, in transit, at the store, or right in your home. Most of the stored food insects also are pests of stored grain or other commodities and may be relatively abundant outdoors. Food products that are left undisturbed on the shelves for long periods are particularly susceptible to infestation. However, foods of any age can become infested.

Stored food insects are capable of penetrating unopened paper, thin cardboard, and plastic, foil, or cellophane-wrapped packages. They may chew their way into packages or crawl in through folds and seams. Insects within an infested package begin multiplying and can spread to other stored foods or food debris that has accumulated in corners, cracks and crevices, and eventually the entire cupboard. All stages (egg, larva, pupa, and adult) may be present simultaneously in infested products.

Most home infestations of pantry pests maintain themselves on spills in the crevices of cupboards and drawers or in opened packages of food stored for long periods of time. Following a few general guidelines when storing food products will help you avoid many potential problems.

Prevention and Detection

- **Purchase dried foods in small amounts** that can be used up in a short period of time. Use oldest products before newer ones, and opened packages before unopened ones.
- **Inspect packages or bulk products before buying.** Packages should be sealed and unbroken. Also check the freshness packaging date. Look for evidence of insects, including holes in the packaging or wrapping.

- **Store insect-free foods in tightly closed glass, metal, or heavy plastic containers.**
- **Refrigerate or freeze small amounts of highly susceptible foods.**
- **Keep storage areas clean.** Do not allow crumbs or spilled foods to accumulate.

Pest Elimination

- ☑ Locate the source of the infestation. Carefully examine all susceptible foods. Throw away all foods that are infested.
- ☑ If infested material is to be salvaged, for example birdseed, or if infestation is questionable, heat the product in shallow pans in a 130°F oven for at least 30 minutes, or place in the freezer at 0°F for at least 4 days.
- ☑ Empty and thoroughly clean cabinets and shelves with a vacuum cleaner to pick up crawling insects and spilled or infested material. Empty the vacuum cleaner or discard the vacuum cleaner bag after use to prevent re-infestation.
- ☑ As a precaution, consider storing susceptible foods in sealable glass, metal, or heavy plastic containers or in the freezer or refrigerator until you are sure the infestation is gone.
- ☑ If insects are infesting ornaments or decorations made with plant products or seeds, place the items in a freezer for four days.
- ☑ Consider insecticide sprays only as a last resort. Call a professional pest control company rather than attempting the use of an insecticide spray your self.
WARNING ON THE USE OF CHEMICALS Be sure to consider your health and safety if you choose to use chemicals to deal with pantry pests.

More information can be found here:

- Kitchen and Pantry Pests <http://lancaster.unl.edu/food/ftoct03.htm>
- Insect Pests of Stored Food <http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/nutrition/DJ1000.html>

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