

Mites: Tiny Invaders, Part 1



Clover Mite

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Mold Mites

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The Truth about Mites

Although mites are not insects they often get grouped in with a vast assortment of urban insect pests. Mites are actually arachnids rather than insects since they have 8 legs (as adults) and two body regions as opposed to the six legs and three body regions that insects have.

Mites are one of the most abundant groups of organisms on the earth. Beneficial mites include species that break down organic matter and predators of pest insects and other mites.

While most mites carry out their business quietly without disturbing anyone, the mites that get attention are the ones that cause problems. The troublemakers (as far as humans are concerned) can generally be divided into two groups: those that are pests in homes such as stored product and dust mites which are a nuisance but are not directly parasites of humans, and mites that bite or are parasites of humans. Since mites are such a large group, this pest press will discuss a few common structural mite pests and the next pest press will discuss some mites that are parasites of humans.

Clover Mites

The mites that are commonly known as "clover mites" are large, red, household invaders that can sometimes be seen indoors in large groups. They are strictly plant-feeders. They sometimes migrate indoors when temperatures change, or host plants outside are destroyed. They never bite humans or cause damage to property but if an attempt is made to crush them, they may leave reddish stains on furniture, walls and upholstery. Although it is uncommon, they may also cause allergic reactions in sensitive individuals.

The best way to prevent clover mites from coming indoors is to create a barrier between plants and buildings. Putting down a mulch or gravel and getting rid of any plants that are directly touching a home will discourage mites from creating populations around the home that could potentially migrate indoors. If mites are already indoors, vacuuming is the best way to get rid of them without crushing them. Vacuum cleaner bags should be disposed of immediately. Although it is difficult to get rid of clover mites, their migrations are short lived and they usually go away on their own within a few days.

Mold Mites

The term “mold mites” refers to a large group of mites that include the “cheese mite”, “grain mite” and “flour mite”. They are not harmful to humans in any way but are a pest of human resources. These mites feed on a wide variety of food sources including mold, fungus, stored grains, pantry products like cereals, and pasta, cheese, fruits, seeds, straw, etc.

The key ingredient for large infestations to flourish is moisture or high humidity. Mites are prone to desiccation, or drying out and need moisture to live and thrive. Control measures include keeping food and other resources dry and controlling the humidity in places where food stuffs will be stored. If infestations are discovered, it’s best to throw away products that are found to have mites in them and clean the areas around the infestations with soap and water to kill any mites that might be lingering in the area. To prevent future infestations, it’s a good idea to store open food stuffs in air tight plastic containers or air tight plastic baggies (depending on the size of your need) to help keep pests out.

Dust Mites

There are a few different species of mites that we commonly refer to as “dust mites”. They have similar life cycles and cause similar problems for human beings so we group them together.

Dust mites primarily feed on dander, or dead skin of humans and animals. This is why they have the capability of building up large populations in places where humans inhabit. Carpet, mattresses, pillows, and upholstery are great habitats for dust mites because they usually supply mites with a constant food source.

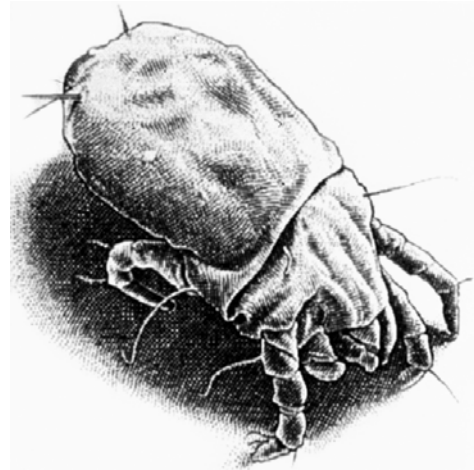
House mites are microscopic but they can cause a number of respiratory problems for humans beings if populations get too numerous. Since they cannot be sight identified, samples must be taken and identified by a trained professional. This is usually not necessary because some simple prevention and control measures can be initiated if mites are a suspected problem. These measures include: dusting and vacuuming frequently, washing sheets, blankets and pillow cases weekly, purchasing a special mattress cover that prevents mites from coming through and using air conditioning rather than opening windows since mites thrive in moist, humid conditions.

School Impacts

Although structural mite pests do not bite humans or transmit diseases, they do have the ability to negatively impact school systems. First and foremost are problems regarding allergic reactions. These can include mild skin irritations, or be more serious such as asthma attacks in certain individuals.

Although some mites are microscopic and not visible to the naked eye, some like the clover mite are large and can be seen crawling slowly along walls (usually near windows). This can not only be a distraction, but may also be alarming to many children and adults who have a fear of insects.

Stored product mites can also be a problem in school kitchens when there are moisture and humidity problems, and when food is stored improperly.



Dust Mite Illustration

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