

insect answers



CARPET BEETLES

Carpet beetles are quite commonly found in homes and apartments in Washington. Don't panic. They are not necessarily a sign of poor housekeeping; they do not carry diseases, bite people, or chew your house apart. However, carpet beetles *can* damage upholstery, rugs, fabrics, or stored foods—so, don't ignore them.

Carpet beetles are a natural part of the outdoors, where they help break down animal matter. They are normally found on dead animal and insect carcasses or in bird and rodent nests. In this case, they feed on hairs or feathers dropped by the animals. The adults often graze on the pollen of flowering plants.

How Do They Get Into Your House?

They can come into your house several ways. The adults can fly in through open doors and windows. You can carry them in on flowers. They can move from the attic or eaves of houses down through the walls and into the house via

cracks or wall sockets. Also, larvae or eggs may be carried in on any of the materials on which the beetles feed, including materials such as stored products that you carry into your house.

Description

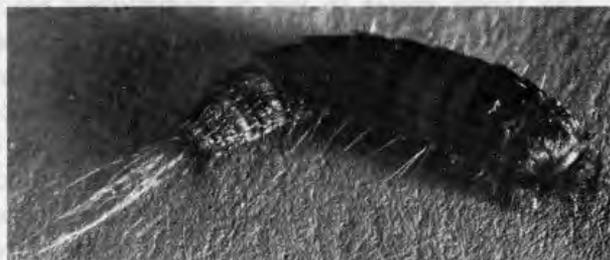
Although there are several kinds of carpet beetles, they all do the same kind of damage and have similar life cycles. More importantly, most species react the same way to control measures. However, you do need to be able to recognize carpet beetles and be able to tell them from other household pests.

Adults of the black carpet beetle have solid black bodies and brownish legs; they vary in length from about 1/8 inch to 3/16 inch. The larvae are yellowish, golden, or dark brown. Their bodies taper down from the head on back; at the rear end there is a tuft of long brown hairs. Larvae grow to be 1 1/2-inch long.

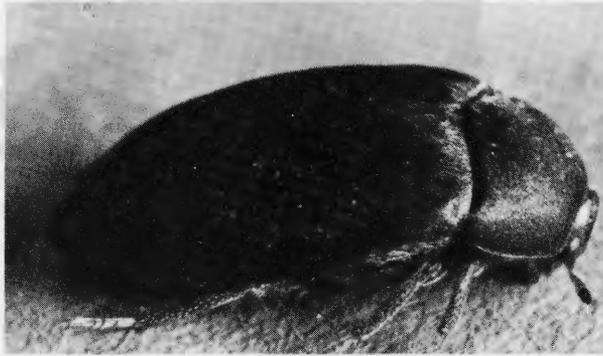
Adults of three other carpet beetle species have mottled coloring of white, brown, yellow, or



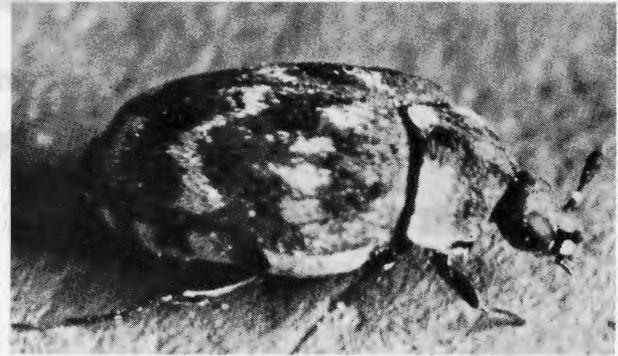
Larva of a carpet beetle, *Anthrenus* sp.



Larva of the black carpet beetle, *Attagenus megatoma*.



Black carpet beetle adult, *Attagenus megatoma*.



Varied carpet beetle adult, *Anthrenus verbasci*.

black; they are about 1/8-inch long. The larvae are long and oval with brownish or black bristles about 1/4-inch long.

Damage

The carpet beetle larvae (the damaging stage) feed on animal proteins—hoof, horn, hair, wool, nails, or feathers, for example. Since they also require certain amounts of vitamins and minerals, they survive best on soiled animal protein—a wool dress or suit that has a perspiration stain or stains, especially around the collar, from body oils.

They have a wide range of food choices both in and out of the house. They can feed on wool, mohair, natural bristles, fur, feathers, down, animal wall trophies, cat and dog food, dead insects (such as those in abandoned wasp nests or accumulated in light fixtures), felt, seeds, fertilizers (such as bone meal), silk, and even in synthetic materials which may have body oils on them. Many also feed on stored products, such as cereals and noodles.

The larvae prefer to live in undisturbed places where they can get enough food. They are often in dresser drawers, closet corners, behind baseboards and moldings—in cracks and crevices where lint and animal fibers, crumbs of food, or insect carcasses have accumulated. Also, look under furniture that you rarely move, and check clothes or fabric scraps that you have stored away for a long time without proper protection.

Prevention and Control

It takes nearly a year to complete the life cycle from egg to adult; it could even take as long as 2 to 3 years if the beetles cannot find enough food. Since you will probably notice the larvae or their cast skins first, you know the problem did not develop overnight and will not get much worse unless you delay a very long time.

Locate the source of infestation by checking likely living places or food preferences that are listed above. Begin looking around the spot where you first noticed the larvae. By the way, you will probably see them for the first time crawling up a light-colored wall. If you find larvae scattered throughout your house, your job of controlling the carpet beetles will be more difficult but not impossible. Either the larvae are spreading out from one infestation (for example, from a bird's nest in the eaves) or there are several infestations. Even though the larvae are spreading out and you find them in several places, remember they cannot multiply. Only adult beetles can lay eggs.

Clean up the area where you find larvae. Pay attention to the dark corners, baseboards and shelves, where lint has accumulated. Throw away or clean infested clothing, blankets, etc., to remove larvae, eggs, or adults. Throw away infested cereals or pet food or heat-treat them; remove bird or wasp nests, vacuum baseboards and moldings, or freeze-treat small items such as ornaments and fur-covered toys. Use whatever method seems suitable.

Store woolens in light containers and protect them by adding moth crystals according to label instructions.

Treat with a household insecticide registered for use on carpet beetles in the home. Be sure you read and follow all directions on the label carefully. Since most household insecticides break down quickly, they must come into direct contact with the insect or as close as possible. Therefore, they are best suited for cracks and crevices. Diazinon, pyrethrin, and rotenone aerosol sprays are some of the available chemicals.

Be alert for any other infestations which you might have missed. Just keep an eye out for

carpet beetles as you go about your daily and weekly cleaning. Even if you have not already seen the beetles, look for them occasionally so you can stop any problem before it gets serious.

Prevent future problems with carpet beetles by storing food and clothing carefully. Then, check periodically to be sure they are okay. Practice good housekeeping habits. Pay special attention to such easy-to-forget places as under heavy furniture, behind drawers, in ceiling lamp fixtures, in closet and shelf corners. Remove empty bird or wasp nests which are attached to your house. Inspect all secondhand items carefully. If you encounter serious problems that you cannot handle, contact a reputable pest control operator.

Sharon Collman, WSU County Agent, Seattle, and Arthur L. Antonelli, WSU Extension Entomologist, Puyallup.

Assistance from Washington State University is available to all persons, without regard to race, color, or national origin. Trade names have been used to simplify the presentation of information. No endorsement of products is intended.



Use pesticides with care. Read the label and follow its directions. Never smoke while using pesticides and avoid breathing the spray or dust. Wear natural rubber gloves when handling pesticides. Wash hands and face carefully with soap and water after applying. If insecticides are spilled on skin or clothing, remove contaminated clothing and wash skin thoroughly. Store pesticides in their original containers and be sure labels remain on the containers. Keep containers away from food or feed and out of reach of children or irresponsible persons.

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