

Keeping Critters Outside

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As the days grow shorter, insects begin migrating to places to spend the winter. Unfortunately, often this is our own homes. Because of the moist season, I'm anticipating more insects and rodents than normal (just based on the number of crickets I disturb walking across my backyard).

The most important way to keep pests outdoors is, quite simply, to deny them entrance. Install door sweeps or thresholds at the base of all exterior entry doors. While lying on the floor, check for light filtering under doors. Gaps of 1/16 inch or less will permit entry of insects and spiders; 1/4 inch-wide gaps (the diameter of a pencil) are large enough for entry of mice; 1/2 inch gaps are adequate for rats. Pay particular attention to the bottom corners as this is often where rodents and insects enter.

Seal utility openings where pipes and wires enter the foundation and siding, e.g., around outdoor faucets, receptacles, gas meters, clothes dryer vents, and telephone/cable TV wires. Holes can be plugged with caulk, cement, urethane expandable foam, steel wool, copper mesh, or other suitable sealant. Caulk cracks around windows, doors, fascia boards, etc.

Repair gaps and tears in window and door screens. Doing so will help reduce entry of flies, gnats, mosquitoes and midges during summer, and cluster flies, lady beetles, and other overwintering pests in early fall. Cracked or broken windows should be replaced.

Install 1/4-inch wire mesh (hardware cloth) over attic, roof, and crawl space vents in order to prevent entry of birds, bats, squirrels, rodents, and other wildlife. Be sure to wear gloves when cutting and installing hardware cloth, as the wire edges are razor sharp. Invest in a chimney cap to exclude birds, squirrels, raccoons and other nuisance wildlife.

Make the outdoor environment around your home less attractive to pests. Firewood should be moved away from the house, to prevent overwintering of insects, rodents, and snakes. Debris and trash should be disposed of. Cut tall grass and weeds, so that rodents and reptiles don't have cover. Clean up spilled seed from bird feeders, because rodents will gorge on whatever the birds don't get, and snakes will snap up the fattened rodents.

Consider applying an exterior (barrier) treatment with insecticides. While sealing is the more permanent way to exclude pests originating from outdoors, pest proofing against overly troublesome pests can be supplemented by an exterior treatment with an insecticide. Homeowners will get the most for their efforts by applying longer-lasting liquid formulations containing synthetic pyrethroids such as Spectracide Triazicide, Ortho Home Defense and Bayer Advanced Multi-Insect Killer.

You can learn about more pest control techniques, both with and without pesticides, at this fall's Master Gardener training class, which starts September 1 and 2. Contact the Purdue Extension Service at (812) 435-5287 for more information.