

How to Deal with Indian Meal Moth

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Fast Facts:

- Indian meal moth adults are ½ an inch in length, are a brown/silvery color. You may find them in the kitchen, fluttering around lights or windows, or travelling room to room.
- The caterpillar stage is the pest. Caterpillars live in and consume stored food products such as flour, cereal, dried fruits, bird seed, and pet food. When infested there will be saw dust like excrement and silk webbing present.
- Control is dependent upon removal of infested items and using traps to catch active adult moths.

BIOLOGY

Indian meal moths are some of our most common indoor insects. Many people will catch the moths flying around the home, banging into lights or windows, or fluttering in the kitchen. You can see in Figure 1 that moth is small (right around half an inch long) and is mostly light brown, with orange wing tips and silver stripes.

While the adult stage is annoying, the true pest stage of this insect is when it is a caterpillar. As larvae they live in and consume many stored food products. People typically find the caterpillars in cereal, course grades of flour, nuts, spices, dried fruit, pet food, or bird seed. You can find the caterpillars themselves, they are creamy white with orange heads, or you may find symptoms that they leave behind such as sawdust like excrement or silk webbing across the top layer of the food. They don't eat much of the stored product but most people are not interested in eating after them and will throw away infested items.



Photos by: Jim Kalisch, UNL Entomology

Figure 1: On the left is an adult Indian meal moth, which measure about 1/2 an inch in length and is light brown, on the right is the caterpillar, which is the damaging stage of this pest

MANAGEMENT

If you see the adults flying in your home you will need to inspect your cupboards and pantry for the caterpillars. Once you locate the infested item, throw it into a plastic bag, tie that shut and throw it into the garbage outdoors. You will also need to eliminate the moths that are present so they cannot mate and begin a new infestation. You can do this by purchasing sticky pheromone traps (Figure 2) at a garden store or hardware store. These traps smell like a female moth and will trap out the males of the population.

Preventative measure against the Indian meal moth include checking food for caterpillars upon purchase, using your stock of food in a timely fashion, and putting stored products into sealable glass or plastic containers rather than keeping them in their original cardboard boxes.



Figure 2

pestkill.org