

What are carpet beetles and how do you get rid of them?

Dr. Jonathan L. Larson, Nebraska Extension Entomologist

Fast Facts

- Carpet beetles are usually found in carpets and rugs, under couch cushions, behind beds, i.e. anywhere that hair and skin particles accumulate. They are about 1/10th to 1/8th of an inch long
- People usually notice their cast off skins or adults crawling/flying inside homes or cars
- Usually these insects do not require an insecticide application, simply vacuuming the infested area will remove larvae, adults, and their food sources



Left to Right: 1. Larvae are yellow-brown and hairy 2. Adults are ladybug shaped and black or black with orange/white stripes 3. You can find adults, larvae, or cast of skins which are hairy and see-through Photos by Jim Kalisch UNL Entomology

Life Cycle

Adults can fly into homes from outside or be brought in on secondhand items. Females lay their eggs in areas with hair and skin debris or she may utilize taxidermied animals, wool clothing, or furs. Populations of carpet beetles typically start in dark, out of the way spaces where they can go through multiple generations before being noticed. Depending on food levels and temperature they can develop from egg to adult in as short as 4 months or up to a year. As populations build they may expand out into the rest of the home and you may notice adult beetle flying towards light sources or windows.

Control

While not generally damaging, carpet beetles can harm certain clothing items and if someone is exposed to them over an extended period of time they may become allergic to them. Control is dependent upon finding the entry points for outside beetles and removing food/harborage inside. Check all windows, screens, and doors for tight seals. If you find entry points you should seal them up with caulk or replace windows/screens. If you know one spot is particularly troublesome you can place sticky traps near that site to catch some of the trespassing beetles. If you are dealing with beetles already inside the home you can remove larvae, pupae, adults, and food sources through vacuuming. Inspect your home, paying close attention to closets, vents, behind and under furniture, between cushions and mattresses, and taxidermy specimens. Be sure to collect the vacuum's contents into a bag that you tie shut and dispose of in an outside dumpster. If some items can fit into a dryer unit, an hour in the dryer on the high heat cycle will also kill carpet beetles. Freezing at 0° for at least 3 weeks is another option. Heavily infested items may need to be ultimately disposed of.