

## Winterize Against Pesky Intruders

*by Broderick Perkins*

Here's another reason to plug holes, stop gaps and otherwise winterize your home.

Pest that get in can be just as expensive as heat that gets out.

The National Pest Management Association (NPMA) says the last thing you want in your home for the holidays are the kind of unwanted guests that can turn out to be real creeps.

Roaches can trigger asthma. Mice can gnaw through electrical wires and insulation. So can rats. All three will get into your pantry.

Yeech.

Unfortunately, just as you want to stay inside where the warmth is delightful, so do vermin and they can be quite frightful.

"Pests adapt to the changing environment and seek refuge indoors during the colder months," says Cindy Mannes, spokeswoman for the association.

"During the winter, rodents such as house mice become one of the most common invaders and can cause serious property damage in and around the home," she added.

Mice can squeeze through spaces as small as a nickel.

NPMA experts offer these tips for winter pest proofing:

- Clean out gutters thoroughly after the majority of leaves have fallen.
- Don't let trash and debris pile up in outside bins. Temporarily store garbage and other waste in sealed containers, but dispose of it regularly.
- Remove old tires, earthen depressions and other areas that can fill up with water and provide a breeding ground for pests. Clean and cover the swimming pool.
- Pull back or remove shrubs and tree branches from the side of the house and roof, to prevent them from serving as pathways into the home. Likewise, pull soil or mulch back from the foundation of the house to prevent termites.
- Stack firewood and lumber at least 20 feet from the house and five inches off the ground to eliminate harborage for termites, rodents, spiders and centipedes.
- Keep up on home-repairs such as restoring loose shingles and rotted boards, which can attract pests such as carpenter ants.
- Seal cracks and holes on the outside of your home including areas where utilities and pipes enter your home.
- Replace weather-stripping and repair loose mortar around basement foundation and windows.

- Repair fascia, soffits, eaves and rotted roof shingles to ward off insects drawn to deteriorating wood.
- Screen vents and openings to chimneys.
- Inspect boxes, grocery bags and other packaging thoroughly to curb hitchhiking insects. Clean up thoroughly after food preparation, especially outside in warmer climates.
- Keep basements, attics, and crawl spaces well ventilated and dry.

"Without proper precaution, pests such as termites, carpenter ants, spiders and rodents can find paths into homes and put families and their properties at risk," Mannes said.

- If pests get the upper hand, call a qualified pest control professional for assistance. Seek licensed professionals through referrals from family, friends, co-workers and others you trust who've been satisfied with a pest control professional's work.

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