

Eek! There's a Mouse in the House!

Barb Ogg
UNL Extension Educator

The house mouse is not very well suited for surviving Nebraska winters. Unlike other animals, it cannot hibernate, but must stay active all year long. It has a very high metabolism and must eat many times each day to maintain its body temperature. We humans help the house mouse survive by providing warm places to live and food to survive.

In the fall of the year, mice circle around your house seeking warmth. They actively investigate any locations where heat is escaping from your house, including the foundation, under doors and utility entrances. To prevent mice from entering, seal all openings that are more than 1/4-inch wide. Check door sweeps and under siding. Mice are also good climbers so don't neglect to seal openings that are high.

Inside, mice will gravitate first toward warm areas like the furnace, refrigerator, stove and dishwasher. They feel their way using their whiskers, which are wider than their body and travel along walls toward dark, protected areas and squeeze behind and beneath objects. Mice leave droppings where they spend time, but they also leave micro-droplets of urine everywhere they travel. The scent in their urine helps mice find old nesting sites and food locations. According to Bobby Corrigan, a nationally known rodent expert, the house mouse deposits 3,000 micro-droplets of urine each day. Under ultraviolet light, mouse urine fluoresces. A black light can be helpful in identifying locations where mice travel and spend time.

Mice are prolific breeders and breed continually. The average size litter is five to six babies and young



Photo by Barb Ogg
Snap traps are the simplest and safest method of killing mice. Place trap(s) against the wall with bait pedal facing the wall.

mice can mate at six weeks. After nesting, parents will drive juvenile mice away from the nest and the prime breeding locations near warmth and food. Once dispersed, the mice will be harder to control. So, if you ignore a mouse infestation for a while, you will have a much bigger problem later. Once you see signs of mice, you need to take action immediately.

Snap Traps

Snap traps are the simplest and safest method of killing mice. I have found the cheapest mouse traps will work fine, but if you are concerned about children or pets, you can buy covered traps, like the Ultra Set® trap made by D-Con®. This trap takes advantage of the mouse's behavior of looking for new hiding places. This trap is also handy because the releasing mechanism is on the outside of the trap housing and mice can be removed without touching the carcass.

Trap Placement?

Place traps where you see droppings or know that mice travel. Place the trap against the wall or another vertical surface with the bait pedal facing the wall to prevent mice from jumping backward.

What Type of Bait?

One of the best baits I have found is a small piece of caramel. Unwrap a cube of caramel and soften it in your hand until you can knead it. Tear off a small piece of caramel and press it in the curl of the trap. One caramel can be used to bait several traps. The reason that caramel works well is mice cannot lick the bait off (like they do with peanut butter). Contrary to popular opinion, cheese isn't a very good bait.

Use Enough Traps

One mistake trappers make is not using enough traps to get rid of the mice quickly. Use more traps than you think you need.

What About Ultrasonic Devices?

Mice can hear sounds in the ultrasonic range. However, a significant amount of research does not support the use of these devices as a practical and cost-effective method of controlling rodents. These devices are sold to unsuspecting people who would be better served by buying the cheaper and more effective snap trap.

What About Poisons?

If food is abundant, mice will hoard it. This means that poisoned pellets get moved from one location to another and there is potential exposure to kids and pets. This is why we don't recommend poisons indoors. If poisons must be used, experts recommend bait blocks, rather than pellets.

Another problem with baits is mice may die in nesting areas or wall voids and produce unpleasant smells. Many people believe poisoned mice are thirsty and will leave the structure to find water, but this old wives' tale isn't true.

Protect Plants Now From Hungry Rabbits

Protect young tree saplings now before winter sets in and hungry rabbits decide to nibble on trees. Exclusion is relatively simple and can save plants from death and/or stunted growth.

One of the best ways to protect a backyard garden or berry patch is to put up a fence. It does not have to be tall or especially sturdy. A fence of two-foot chicken wire with the bottom tight to the ground or buried a few inches is sufficient. Be sure the mesh is one-inch or smaller so that young rabbits will not be able to go through it.

A heavy fence of welded wire, chain link or hog wire will keep rabbits, pets and children out of the garden and can be used to trellis vine crops. The lower 1½–2 feet should be covered with small mesh wire. A fence may seem costly, but with proper care it will last many



Photo by Vicki Jeeffika, UNL Extension in Lancaster County
This photo shows where rabbits stood on top of drifted snow and gnawed bark on tree saplings.

years and provide relief from the constant aggravation of rabbit damage. Inexpensive chicken wire can be replaced every few years.

Cylinders of 1/4-inch wire hardware cloth will protect valuable young orchard trees or landscape plants. The cylinders should extend higher than a rabbit's reach while standing on the expected snow depth, and stand one to two inches

out from the tree trunk. Larger mesh sizes, ½- to ¾-inch, can be used to reduce cost, but be sure the cylinder stands far enough away from the tree trunk that rabbits cannot eat through the holes.

When rabbits are abundant and food is in short supply, only hardware cloth will guarantee protection. Small mesh (1/4-inch hardware cloth) also protects against mouse damage.

Source: Stephen Vantassel, UNL Wildlife Project Coordinator

FOR MORE INFORMATION

UNL Extension NebGuide G1526, "Prevention and Control of Rabbit Damage" available online at <http://lanaster.unl.edu/pest> or the extension office.

Small Hive Beetle Workshop for Beekeepers, Oct. 27

A workshop on how to recognize and manage small hive beetles will be offered by Marion Ellis, UNL Extension beekeeping specialist, on Saturday, Oct. 27, 10 a.m.–12 p.m. at the Lancaster Extension Education Center, 444 Cherrycreek Road, Lincoln. Pre-registration is not required.



Adult(s) small hive beetle.

The small hive beetle (*Aethina tumida*), was recently found in Nebraska. Because all life stages of the small hive beetle are killed by freezing conditions, it is unlikely this will be a major problem for Nebraska beekeepers, but it is important for them to learn how to recognize the beetles and their damage. Additional informational meetings will be scheduled in February at various sites around the state.

Assistance with Wildlife Problems

Nebraskans who experience damage and nuisance problems with wildlife can get assistance from several public and private organizations. In Lancaster County, you'll find resources available from the following agencies:

University of Nebraska–Lincoln

Extension — Through its educators, specialists and assistants, UNL Extension offers a wide range of information on managing wildlife and wildlife damage. Ph: 402-441-7180 (Lancaster County Residents) Web site: <http://lanaster.unl.edu/pest>

Animal Control–Lincoln/Lancaster

County — Provides trap rental, wildlife removal and assistance (a fee may be involved), dead animal pickup. Ph. 402-441-7900. Web site: <http://www.lincoln.ne.gov/city/health/animal/index.htm>

Nebraska Game and Parks

Commission — Provides information, limited materials and emergency on-site assistance for damage caused by game and non-game species. Provide permits for trapping/removal of wildlife. Ph. 402-471-0641. Web site: <http://www.ngpc.state.ne.us/>

Private Pest Management Businesses

— Provide products and services for managing problem wildlife. Check your local yellow pages under "Animal Pests" or "Pest Control Services."

Raptor Recovery — Care of injured or orphaned birds of prey; educate public on the value of raptures; assist in research and management of rapture population in the wild. Ph: 402-488-7586, 402-483-4303, 402-525-8682, or 402-994-2009 (Elmwood). Web site: <http://raptorrecoverynebr.org>

Wildlife Rescue Team — Raise, rehabilitate and release orphaned or injured wildlife (except birds of prey); provide educational programs for schools and civic groups. Ph. 402-473-1951

USDA-APHIS-WIS — Primarily assists farmers, ranchers, residents, industries, organizations and agencies in protecting agriculture, property, natural resources and human health and safety from damage or threats posed by wildlife. Limited assistance may be available for Lancaster County. Ph. 402-434-2340. Web site: http://www.aphis.usda.gov/wildlife_damage/

—Compiled by Soni Cochran,
UNL Extension Associate

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For a detailed list of who to contact for technical information, materials, permits and hands-on assistance, pick up the UNL publication "Assistance With Wildlife Damage Problems in Nebraska" from the extension office. It is also available on the Web at <http://www.ianrpubs.unl.edu/sendIt/nf247.pdf>