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How To Get Rid of Mice: A Step-By-Step Guide



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Quick Debrief: What Are We Dealing With?

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Mice are social creatures that live together in groups and communicate via pheromones - chemically released hormones that signal information about:

- Food
- Mating
- Safety & shelter
- Health, stress, fear, and more

Moreover, mice are usually discovered only when their numbers exceed a threshold that makes their presence noticeable. Where you find one, there are likely many more.

Did you also know that mice can:

- Climb vertical surfaces including wood, brick, and concrete
- Chew through wood, rubber, vinyl, plastic, and electrical wiring
- Jump approximately 10-12 inches onto a flat surface
- **Travel along wires, ropes, and narrow ledges, and even swim**

Fact

Under ideal indoor conditions, one breeding pair of house mice can theoretically lead to more than 1,500 descendants within one year, creating the potential for extensive infestations and property damage.

Pro Tip

Pheromones are often released through mice droppings and urine. Look for droppings that are ⅛ -¼ inch long, dark, and tapered at one or both ends. A house mouse may deposit approximately 50-75 pelllets per day



DID YOU KNOW?

In a 2024 survey of 1,000 U.S. homeowners, 29% reported having experienced a mouse infestation. Across all types of pest infestations, 52% chose to handle removal themselves, while 42% hired a professional.

A Mouse's Diet



Fruit



Nuts



Berries



Pinecone Seeds



Pet Droppings



Body: 5-7 inches

Tail: 3-4 inches

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Chapter 1: Inspection

Inspecting your home is the first step in getting rid of mice. It helps you identify the extent of the infestation, locate entry points, and understand where mice may be nesting.

Since 2013, rodent activity has risen across the Bay Area, including:

- 33.36% in Contra Costa County
- 27.52% in Alameda County
- 242% in San Mateo County

Pro Tip

Document evidence with photos and notes where possible.



1. Ensure You Have The Right Equipment

Before you begin, gather all necessary materials, including:

- A flashlight
- Gloves
- A P100 mask

You'll need a flashlight to inspect some dark, hard-to-see places. Gloves and a mask, on the other hand, are essential for protecting yourself from potential health hazards, **as mouse droppings and urine can carry diseases.**



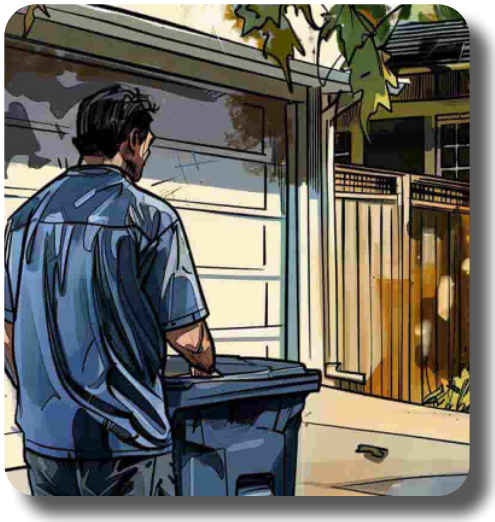
DID YOU KNOW?

Unsecured trash is the #1 leading contributor of an increasing rodent population.

2. Check Around Trash For Holes, Damage, & Droppings

Mice are attracted to easily accessible food sources, such as trash. Examine where you keep your trash, pet food, and other food storage areas. Look for holes, gnaw marks, or droppings that are a clear sign of their presence. Remove any food sources immediately if you notice any damage - they could be contaminated.





Pro Tip

Properly secure trash bins and promptly remove food waste to reduce the risk of rodent infestations. Easy access to shelter and food, especially from trash, **can extend mice's lifespans by up to 900%**, making infestations harder and costlier to clean.

Pro Tip

If your trash bin is damaged or broken, contact your local waste company about repair or replacement options.

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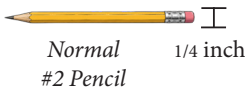
3. Inspect Possible Entry Points

Walk around your home and inspect potential entry points - **check for ¼ inch gaps (or larger)** around doors, windows, siding, cracks in walls, pipes, vents, utility lines, foundations, and roof transitions. Sealing these is critical - understanding where (and how) mice are entering your house can help you prevent them from entering in the future.





Mice can slip through holes as small as 1/4 inch in diameter.



Normal #2 Pencil 1/4 inch

Check carefully - structural defects such as holes and cracks remain the #1 underlying cause of rodent infestations.



Do not proceed past Step 3 without the recommended equipment.

4. Determine High-Clutter Areas To Evaluate

Mice prefer to hide in cluttered, undisturbed areas, such as:

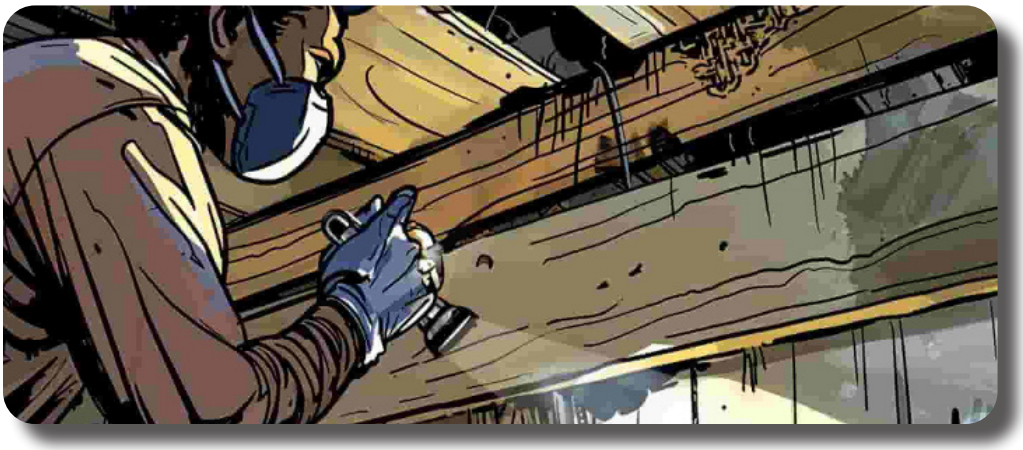
- Attics
- Basements
- Crawl spaces
- Garages
- Additional Dwelling Units (ADUs), and more.

Evaluating rodent activity there can help you **quickly identify hiding spots and the extent of a possible infestation**. Also, by reducing clutter, you can make these areas less attractive to mice.

Pro Tip



If you suspect an entry point, fill small holes and gaps with dirt or crumpled paper. Check back the next day to see if it's moved. This helps pinpoint and validate entry points.





One of the biggest mistakes homeowners make is simply ignoring the signs of an infestation. If control measures aren't enforced, they'll simply repopulate.

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5. Identify Signs of Rodent Activity

- **Droppings/Urine Marks**: Often found along "runways" or near food sources. Urine marks may appear as stains or streaks.
- **Torn/Damaged Insulation And HVAC Ducts**: Mice will shred insulation and HVAC ducts to use as nests. Rigorously evaluate.



- **Gnaw Marks**: Look for chew marks on wood, plastic, or structural material. Mice constantly gnaw on hard materials **to keep their teeth short and reduce stress**.
- **Nest Particles**: Twigs, paper, leaves, torn insulation, and more.



- **Runways & Grease Marks:** Mice create paths or "runways" that they frequently travel. Over time, these paths become marked with dark, greasy tracks from their fur.
- **Chewed Electrical Wiring**: This is a serious sign of mice activity and particularly dangerous as **it can lead to electrical fires.**

Fact

An estimated 25% of all fires attributed to "unknown causes" are likely started by rodents gnawing on gas lines and electrical wiring every year, resulting in an average estimated property loss of $20,371.

STOP

If you find a dead mouse, droppings, debris, contaminated material, or any damage caused by mice, **DO NOT TOUCH** it.

For dead mice, wear gloves and turn a plastic bag inside out. Grasp the mouse with the bag's inside, then turn the bag right side up. Proceed to Page 8 for detailed handling instructions.

DID YOU KNOW?

Mouse teeth grow continuously, which is why they gnaw frequently on food packaging, wood, plastic, insulation, appliance cords, and wiring. In fact, because of their gnawing, rodents cause over $282 million in property damage in North America alone each year.

DID YOU KNOW?

It takes only 30 seconds for a small flame to turn into a major blaze.

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Chapter 2: Kick Them Out

To kick mice out, find their hiding places and eliminate their sense of safety and security. ***Make sure you wear disposable:***

- *Gloves
- *Foot covers
- A full protective face mask
- A protective heavy-duty coverall suit

**Use duct tape to secure to your coverall suit*



Fact

It takes just 3.84 hours for one mouse's droppings to reach the human allergen threshold of 1.6 µg/g. Contaminants in a mouse's urine, feces, and nests can become easily airborne if touched or inhaled, causing severe asthma attacks, diseases, & other health hazards.

Pro Tip

Wear disposable, protective gear wherever possible when cleaning up. Use containment barriers (e.g., plastic sheeting) throughout the house to protect against the spread of possible contaminants and diseases.

1. Identify Their "Nesting Locations"

Mice thrive in places where they feel secure and hidden. Your goal is to disrupt their environment to force them out by making their hiding places "uncomfortable" and "not safe anymore."







DID YOU KNOW?

Rodents can spread up to 35 diseases, such as hantavirus and salmonella.

DID YOU KNOW?

49% of rats have Salmonella, and even 1 mouse can introduce 23 million Salmonella bacteria through their droppings in a single day, 460x the human threshold for infection.

First, focus on the entry points and signs of activity such as **droppings, gnaw marks, and torn insulation** - use these clues to track their movements. Follow grease marks and runways to trace their paths from entry points to nesting locations. Pay special attention to cluttered or dark, undisturbed spots, as these are prime locations for mouse nests.

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2. Examine & Turn Over All Clutter

Mice often hide in cluttered areas, so carefully turn over any items where they might be nesting. This includes boxes, piles of paper, or any other debris that provides cover. Removing clutter not only exposes their hiding spots but also makes your home less attractive to them.



STOP

Remember, turning over contaminated materials can **cause particles to become airborne**. Be cautious when handling items, and ensure you have disposable, protective gear covering your entire body.

3. Safely Remove All Contaminated Materials & Debris

It's crucial to **remove anything that has been contaminated by mice**. When you eliminate their scent trails and nesting materials, you make it harder for them to return. Follow these guidelines:

- **Remove Damaged Insulation:** **If mice have shredded insulation**, remove it. This gets rid of nesting material and pheromones.







DID YOU KNOW?

Rodent infestations increase energy bills by an annual average of $653.77 for Northern California homeowners due to insulation damage alone.

DID YOU KNOW?

Fiberglass insulation costs surged by 76% between 2019-2024 and show few signs of slowing down in the long run.

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- **Remove Damaged HVAC Ducts and Chewed Wiring**: **Mice often burrow in HVAC ducts** for warmth and chew wires to reduce stress. Promptly repair them to prevent fires & contaminant spread.





Pro Tip

If wiring has been chewed, avoid touching or using the damaged circuit or equipment. Shut off power when it can be done safely and contact a licensed electrician for evaluation and repair.

- **Vacuum Up As Much As Possible**: **Use a heavy duty, specialized HEPA vacuum cleaner** to remove droppings, dead mice, and other debris. This helps avoid spreading contaminants and reduces
- **Remove All Contaminated Material**: Discard any items that have been contaminated. If you must keep an item, thoroughly clean it with a disinfectant (refer to page 10).



DID YOU KNOW?

22% of inner-city children suffer from rodent-induced asthma, largely caused by poorly ventilated areas with no HEPA filters. Additionally, poor ventilation is the #1 risk factor for infection by rodents.

4. Place All Material In Large, Thick Trash Bags

After gathering all the contaminated materials, place them in large trash bags, seal them tightly, and **dispose of them ASAP** at a dump.



Pro Tip

If you have an HVAC system, make sure to use HEPA filters. These filters are designed to capture tiny particles, including those that could be contaminated with mice droppings or urine, and can greatly reduce the chances for infection, disease, or asthma.

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Chapter 3: Get Your Home Back

After you've kicked the mice out of your home, it's time to restore your living space to a clean and safe condition. First, focus on disinfecting the contaminated areas and sanitizing them properly.

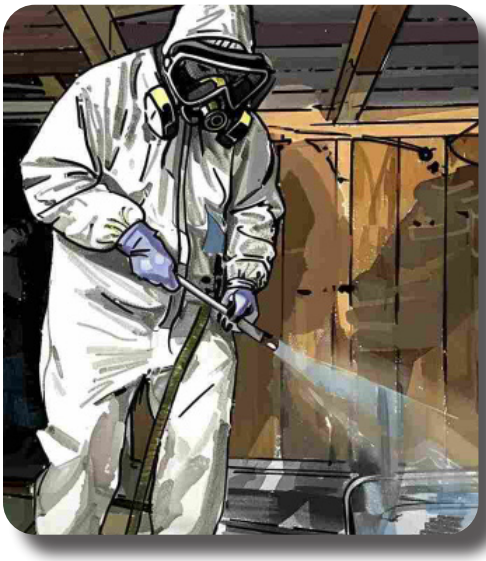


Sanitize & Decontaminate

Sanitize areas contaminated by mouse droppings, urine, grease marks, nesting materials, and any surfaces or items they may have come into contact with. This ensures that potential pathogens and allergen residue are thoroughly cleaned.

Fact

Using other popular household cleaning items such as bleach will NOT properly disinfect the contaminated areas, and might cause contaminants to become airborne if cleaned incorrectly.





STOP

Remember to protect yourself from contaminants and chemicals. Wear disposable gloves, shoe covers, masks, and protective clothing, and duct tape all connecting parts together.

Pro Tip

Consider using Nisus DSV®, a powerful disinfectant and sanitizer. DSV is effective against a wide range of pathogens and is ideal for cleaning areas that have been contaminated by mice. This product is designed for use on hard, non-porous surfaces and is particularly effective when sprayed from a lawn & garden pump sprayer, especially for hard-to-reach areas. Check availability via your local home improvement store.

DID YOU KNOW?

Most droppings become gray, dusty, and crumbly after only 2 weeks, meaning they're much more prone to become airborne at that point.

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Chapter 3: Get Your Home Back

Here are some other important steps:

- **Wet All Surfaces**: **Thoroughly saturate contaminated areas with a disinfectant solution** (e.g., **Nisus DSV**), including countertops, floors, and any other spots showing signs of mice activity. This helps eradicate bacteria and viruses that pose health risks.



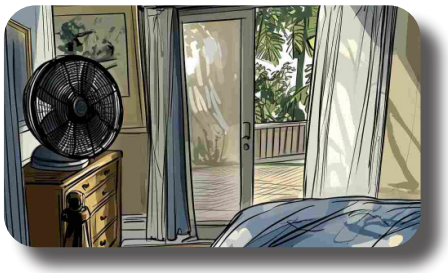
- **Allow Disinfectant To Set**: Let the disinfectant sit for ***at least 10 minutes*** to ensure its effectiveness. Afterward, rinse the surface or let it air dry. Finally, use disposable cloths to wipe up any excess.



- **Clothing & Fabrics**: Immediately wash any exposed fabrics and clothing, such as curtains, bedding, and shirts, in ***hot water.*** The high temperature will likely kill any remaining pathogens.



- **Air Out Your Home**: Open windows and use fans to ventilate your home once all contaminated materials have been saturated. This helps remove any lingering odors and airborne particles from the cleaning process.



- **Consider Natural Deterrents**: **Use peppermint oil to deter mice from returning (temporarily)**. Also, you may consider other forms of natural deterrents, such as eucalyptus oil, citrus oils (from fruits like lemons or oranges), bay leaves and clove oil.



Pro Tip

If you don't have an open window in places like your attic, basement, or crawlspace, consider placing a fan near the entrance and direct it towards the outside to ensure proper air movement.

DID YOU KNOW?

Mice dislike the smell of peppermint oil for two reasons: (1) it has a strong, sharp scent that can irritate their olfactory senses (i.e., sense of smell); and (2) it helps to temporarily mask other pheromones, which can interfere with their ability to detect food, predators, safety, etc.

Pro Tip

Place peppermint oil-soaked cotton balls in areas where mice are likely to enter. This may provide a temporary scent deterrent, but it should not replace mouse-proof repairs or trapping.

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Chapter 4: Keep Them Out

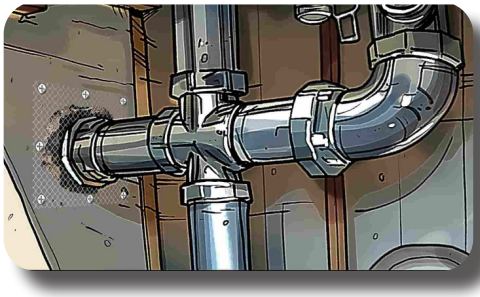
Next, focus on preventing future infestations. This involves sealing entry points, maintaining cleanliness, and using hardware deterrents.



1. Seal Access & Prevent Re-Entry

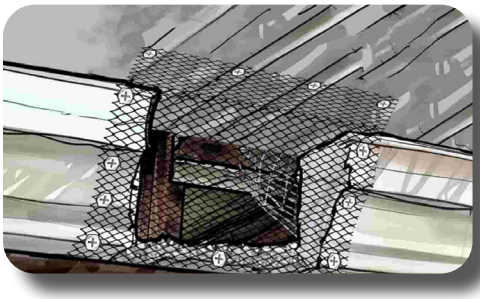
Mice can squeeze through ¼ inch openings, **so seal all possible entry points you come across**. Here are mice's most common sources of entry:

- **Pipes**: Check for gaps around pipes and use steel wool and caulk to seal them. **Steel wool is difficult for mice to chew through.**
- **Vents**: Install wire mesh screens with screws over vents to keep mice out while still allowing airflow.





- **Holes/Cracks**: Use steel wool and expanding foam to seal any holes and cracks, even oddly shaped ones.
- **Roof Entry Points**: Mice can enter through damaged shingles or gaps in the eaves. **Repair any damage with hardware cloth and screws**, or even metal flashing if necessary.





- **Doorways, Windows, Entryways**: Install door sweeps or weatherstrips on exterior doors. Check that windows close tightly, and repair any gaps or holes around frames.



During gnawing, mice can exert approximately 40,600 PSI of concentrated pressure at their incisor tips. Using the comparison figures in this guide, that is approximately 250x the force of a human's bite (162 psi), 50x times that of a lion's (650-1,000 psi), and 19x that of an American Alligator's (2125 psi).

Pro Tip



Seal tough or hard-to-get-to holes/cracks with hardware cloth or wire mesh secured with screws for added protection.

Pro Tip



Mice often chew through standard weatherstrips. Instead, use rodent-proof weatherstrips (e.g., RodeXit), which are designed to keep rodents out.

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2. Replace Damaged & Vulnerable Areas

Insulation, HVAC ducts, and wiring that have been chewed or contaminated **should be *replaced, not repaired*** to prevent future infestation. They can still have bacteria, allergens, and pose fire hazards.

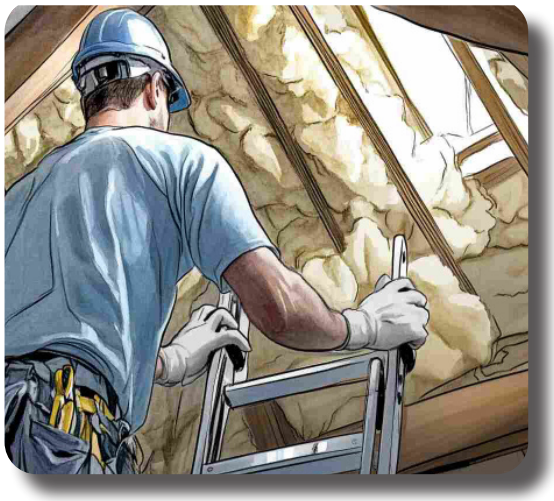


Fact

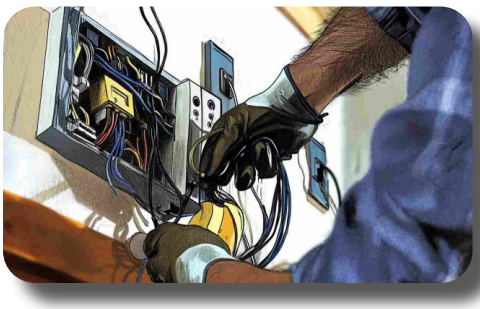
Homeowners are:

- 2.68x more likely to see a rodent if they have a crack or hole in their exterior foundation;
- 4x more likely if they have a small hole in their roof

Additionally, these materials can retain pheromones, attracting other nearby mice and encouraging them to return. New insulation **restores energy efficiency and eliminates hiding spots**, new HVAC ducts ensure clean air circulation, and new wiring prevents fire risks. Repairing structural damage restores the safety of your home's foundation.



If you see any vulnerable areas, even without clear rodent damage, the recommendation is to **strengthen them now**. This includes broken screens, damaged roof tiles, or other potential entry points.





DID YOU KNOW?

50% of mice and 33% of all rodents have fleas. Moreover, rodents act as the main host type for 80% of all known flea species.

DID YOU KNOW?

Fleas - *primarily carried by mice and rats* - were responsible for transmitting the Black Plague, which killed over 25 million people in the 14th century.

DID YOU KNOW?

Published cost and project estimates suggest that a professional team may complete some severe remediation work in approximately 4–8 hours, while a DIY effort can extend for weeks or as long as two months. Actual timing depends on the size, contamination, access, and repair scope.

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3. Set Traps For The Stragglers & Starve The Rest

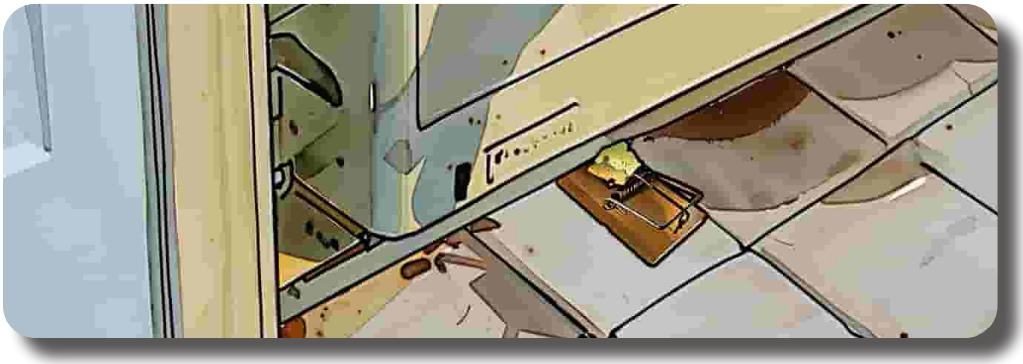
Even after taking preventive measures, a few mice might remain. Properly setting traps and removing food sources will help eliminate any stragglers.



Place traps near entryways, along wall edges, and in areas with runways, grease marks, or mouse activity.



Additionally, place traps near sources of warmth, like water heaters, as mice are drawn to these spots, especially in winter.



Pro Tip

Before setting traps for mice, make sure you get ***mouse traps***. Rat traps are larger and may not trigger reliably under a mouse's lighter weight.

Pro Tip

Place mouse traps near entryways, which are high-traffic areas for mice. Research shows that mice frequently pass by these spots, especially when foraging for food outside. They are generally curious and may investigate newly placed traps relatively quickly. Also, place enough traps rather than relying on one or two traps across a large area.

Pro Tip

Though you can use a variety of different foods, **peanut butter** often works best in mouse traps as its scent is highly attractive.

Pro Tip

When placing a mouse trap, be sure that the "bait side" (i.e., where you would put the peanut butter) is facing the wall. That way, you decrease the chances of them escaping.

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Chapter 5: Make Sure They Don't Return

Preventing future infestations is crucial to maintaining a rodent-free home. This involves regular maintenance, inspections, and adopting habits that deter mice.



1. Keep Removing Food Sources



- **Secure Trash**: Properly secure your trash bins with tight-fitting lids to prevent mice from accessing food waste. Store trash in sealed bags and keep bins clean and free of holes.



- **Store Food Properly**: Keep pet food in sealed containers and avoid leaving it out overnight. Try to store as many boxed goods and pantry items in airtight containers to prevent possible access.



- **Yard Maintenance**: **Pick up fallen fruit, nuts, berries, pinecones, and *pet droppings*** from your yard regularly. Minimize bird seed spillage around feeders.

Pro Tip

Try to schedule your daily task of yard maintenance at the same time every day. You'll likely want to do it before dark, as rodents consume 70-85% of their food at night.

DID YOU KNOW?

Mice need only about 12.7 calories a day to survive. Nut-bearing or fruit trees nearby can easily provide this, making it easier for mice to thrive.

Nearby Food Sources



~385 calories



~42 calories



73 calories

Fact

House mice rarely travel more than 30 feet for food. In fact, nearby seeds from a single gray pine pinecone, an orange, and daily acorn production from one oak tree can feed over 39 mice a day.

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Chapter 5: Make Sure They Don't Return

2. Consistently Monitor Your Property

Regular inspections help catch early signs of a rodent problem before it becomes a full-blown infestation. **Perform inspections every 2-3 months**, looking for entry points, signs of activity, and droppings.

Fact

Physical rodent exclusion has achieved reductions in rodent intrusion of up to 98.5%, demonstrating its effectiveness.



Even if you don't see signs of mice, keeping a few traps set can help catch any stragglers. Check traps regularly and **move traps every three weeks** to cover different areas.

By removing trash and natural food sources in the yard, performing regular inspections, and keeping traps set, you can effectively deer mice from returning after your initial rodent exclusion efforts.







DID YOU KNOW?

Mice are generally curious about new objects, but poorly positioned traps, insufficient trap density, competing food, or the wrong trap size can still lead to low capture rates.

Pro Tip

At the end of the day, just remember the simple acronym "TTY" - Trash, Traps, and Yard for daily upkeep. A little bit each day goes a long way

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