



Also known as Drugstore Beetles, (*Stegobium paniceum*) are small reddish-brown beetles 2 to 3 mm long. They are relatives of the woodworm beetle and may sometimes be mistaken for woodworm. They commonly infest hard, dry, starch-containing foods such as cereals and spices. They can enter packages which are not tightly closed, and can bore through cellophane, tin foil and cardboard to reach preferred foods.

They are not dangerous, but they can be a nuisance when they infest a food cupboard. They are also often associated with old bird nests in roof spaces.

Biscuit beetles are found throughout the world, and are likely to have been spread by ships in former times. It is thought that the old habit of banging ship's biscuits on the table before eating them might have been to drive out the beetle larvae, plus other insects like weevils.

Its American name 'Drugstore beetle' comes from its ability to breed in dried vegetable matter of any kind, even poisonous substances such as strychnine, belladonna or aconite.

Life cycle

Female biscuit beetles will lay eggs freely either in a preferred food product or in crevices near to it. When conditions are warm enough (they need 20°C or more – this is average room temperature) the eggs will hatch into larvae ½ mm long which wander around the surrounding area, crawling through tiny spaces to reach foodstuffs. They can survive starvation for up to 8 days while looking for food. After about 2 months, depending upon the temperature, the larvae pupate in cocoons, often within the food, until 1 or 2 weeks later the adults hatch. The adults bore their way through food or packaging to emerge, making holes which can look rather like woodworm.

The adult beetles do not eat, instead they wander about for 3 to 4 weeks, during which time they will breed and lay more eggs. They will often wander far from the original site, and may be found on work surfaces and other locations around the room. They may sometimes be found on window frames, where they are attracted by light. They are strong fliers.

Control

The first thing to do is empty food cupboards, trace the infested food, and dispose of all the infested food you can find. They prefer hard, dry starchy products, although they can eat almost anything organic if required, and can penetrate sealed packets and tin foil. They may also be found in screw topped jars if these have not been properly closed. The kind of foodstuffs which may be affected are:

Cereal products
Biscuits
Dried meat

Nuts and spices
Packet soups and drinks
Pasta

Dog biscuits and chews
Dried vegetables

Items you are not sure about are best disposed of or sealed in plastic containers or screw topped jars (tightly closed!) and left for a few months.

This will help to ensure that any new food you buy is not re-infested.

When the cupboards are emptied, thoroughly clean down all the surfaces, paying particular attention to corners and crevices. Then spray the surfaces with an insecticide for use with crawling insects, again, making sure that you reach the corners. Try to get an insecticide with a 'residual' effect, and make sure that it is approved for use in food rooms (check the label).

After the spray has dried, and has been left for any period stated on the can, you can put food back into the cupboard and preferably in containers. Try to store newly bought starchy items such as flour, rice or biscuits in sealed containers so that they cannot be attacked by any beetles missed by the insecticide. Make sure that you rotate stocks to use up old items first and dispose of anything past its sell by date.

If the beetles are in areas other than the kitchen, particularly on the first floor, it is likely that they are coming from a birds nest in the vicinity. Check the loft space and make sure that there are no old bird's nests which might be harbouring the beetles. If there are, carefully remove and dispose of them and thoroughly spray the area with a residual insecticide for use with crawling insects.

Treatment

Harrow Council can provide an affordable, chargeable service for the treatment of Biscuit beetles in domestic (including rented) and commercial properties. Please contact us for further advice.

Safety

Be safe. Always read the label before using insecticides and follow the instructions given. Do not breath it in as you spray, and never spray around children or pets or directly onto food work surfaces.

Do not allow food to come into direct contact with chemicals sprays.

Advice on the identification and control of all household pests is provided free of charge and is available by phone, email or via our website.

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