

So You Have Mice— Now What?

If you have a rodent problem in your home, you first want to determine whether your invaders are mice, voles or shrews. Once you know their physical characteristics, their preferred habitat and their behaviors, you will be able to identify them fairly easily and begin to take measures to remove them.



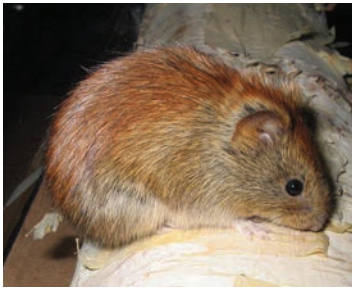
Voles seldom venture into homes, although they may be found in fishing camps and unused cabins. They have dense underfur covered with longer guard hairs. Voles tend to be vegetarians and eat a wide range of plants.

The diet of a shrew consists mainly of insects and it may enter the home in search of food. Shrews need to eat every three to four hours and will consume three times their body weight in a 24-hour period. They are aggressive and carry many of the diseases that mice do. The home maintenance suggestions, sanitary practices and removal techniques described in this article should work for shrews as well as for mice.

Homes are a natural place for mice to go since they can find all the things necessary for survival there: water, shelter and food. Unfortunately, they can cost us money in destroyed food, affect our health and increase our workload.

In six months, one pair of mice can eat four pounds of food and contaminate 10 times that amount with urine and some of the 18,000 droppings they produce during that time. They can contaminate food-preparation surfaces, dinner plates, glasses and cookware with feces and urine, which can contain the bacterium that causes food poisoning (salmonellosis). Ringworm, tapeworm, dermatitis and salmonella are a few of the diseases that can be spread by mice.

Mice constantly gnaw. If they get into the walls, they will chew on insulation, electrical wiring and wall studs. They can also get into appliances and gnaw on the wiring, which may result in expensive repair bills, replacement of the appliance or a house fire.

	Mice	Shrews	Voles
Ears	Large for body size	Small	Very small, partially hidden under fur
Tail	Ridged, nearly hairless	Smooth, some hair	Short, smooth (about a third the length of the body)
Snout	Slightly pointed	Narrow and pointed	Short
Other	Delicate body, grooved incisor teeth, mostly active at night	Dense fur of uniform color, pointed teeth with dark tips	Stocky body, short legs, active day and night
			
	House mouse	Arctic shrew	Red-backed vole

— Don't Welcome Mice Into the Home —

Maintain buildings.

1. Fill any openings greater than ¼ inch. Steel wool mixed with caulking compound makes a good plug. Smooth the plug to prevent mice from pulling or chewing it out.
2. Seal cracks in foundations and openings for water pipes and vents with concrete or metal.
3. Do regular inspections to check for new openings.
4. Make sure windows and doors fit snugly. Check thresholds, door sweeps and garage door seals.

Practice good sanitary habits.

5. Store food in mouse-proof containers (food-safe glass, metal or heavy plastic with tight-fitting lids).
6. Keep bulk animal food in clean garbage cans with tight-fitting lids. Give your pet only as much food as it will eat at one feeding since mice will often eat leftover food from the pet dish.
7. Empty household trash (especially food scraps) nightly.
8. Clean up spilled food items, such as dog food, grains, chocolate and crumbs.
9. Remove empty boxes and old papers that can be used for bedding and hiding from storage sites.

Physically remove the mice from your home.

10. Snap or spring traps are the most common. These traps can be purchased locally and cheaply.
11. Because mice tend to travel around the edges of rooms, placing three traps side by side (in the

travel path) with the bait ends against the wall will increase the effectiveness of spring traps. Good baits are essential: bacon and peanut butter are traditional baits. A cotton ball securely attached to the trigger also works; female mice like to use cotton for bedding.

12. Live traps and glue traps are also available, but they need to be checked often. Trapped mice should be destroyed in a humane manner.
13. Rodenticides are available and should be used with caution around pets and children. Tamper-resistant feeding stations are available and should be used if possible. The local Cooperative Extension Service has access to information on pesticides currently registered in Alaska.

References

Olkowski, William, Sheila Daar and Helga Olkowski. 1991. *Common-Sense Pest Control: Least-Toxic Solutions for Your Home, Garden, Pets and Community*. Newtown, Connecticut: The Taunton Press.

Wildlife Resources Committee. Cooperative Extension Service. University of Nebraska.

Photos by Phil Meyers, Museum of Zoology, University of Michigan and the Animal Diversity Web, <http://animaldiversity.org> (arctic shrew); Susan Hoffman, Miami University, Ohio (house mouse, copyrighted); and Tom Belik, Fairbanks, Alaska (red-backed vole).

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