

Indian Meal Moths: Prevention Tips



Indian meal moths can quickly destroy dried, stored foods in grocery stores, warehouses, and processing facilities. To help discourage them in your establishment, institute a thorough cleaning and sanitation program and follow these prevention tips.

Where you might see them

- Moths may be seen near packages, boxes, sacks, and shelves that contain dried foods such as rice, bird seed, cornmeal, chocolate, whole wheat, crackers, dog food, and dried fruits. However, nearly any dried food can be a source of infestation.
- Cocoons are commonly seen in the seams of packages.
- Caterpillars may be found in the edges and seams of packages, and sometimes underneath. They also will hide in cracks and crevices of shelves where packages are stored.
- Caterpillars may crawl several feet from a source to pupate.

Tips for prevention

- Inspect all incoming goods for moths, caterpillars or cocoons. Look on packaging, near seams, and under shrinkwrap.
- To resolve stored product pest issues, it is critical to identify and remove infested material. Food, dust, and debris are often overlooked as a food source.
- Vacuum under shelves and racks to remove any spilled product, which can become a breeding site for Indian meal moths.
- Use the First In, First Out method of product rotation to avoid products sitting for long periods of time.
- Freeze packages known to contain moths. Temperature must reach 0°F (-18°C) for at least four days to kill all life stages. Heavily infested products may need to be discarded.
- Hold high-value dried foods in a refrigerator to slow Indian meal moth development and stop further infestation.
- Avoid using decorations with dried corn, flowers, or seeds that may attract the pests.
- Use pheromone traps to monitor for activity and alert you to early signs of an issue.



ID and biology

- The adult Indian meal moth is about 9.5 mm long.
- Adults have two-toned wings: copper on the rear and pale gray or white closer to the head. Sometimes the wings have mottled bands of colour.
- The head of the Indian meal moth is pointed, giving it a snout-like appearance.
- Adults live up to two weeks and do not eat. The female can lay 100 - 400 eggs.
- The caterpillar form of the Indian meal moth is approximately 12.7 mm long and cream-coloured. The colouring can take on the hue of the food source.
- Indian meal moth cocoons are silky and frail.
- Life cycle, from egg to moth, takes approximately 25 days.

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