

# Purge Pantry Shelves Of Unwanted Pests

NEWARK, Del. — Homeowners may be disconcerted to discover beetle grubs in their grits or moth larvae in the cat's kibble, but these unsavory "pantry pests" usually come from warehouses rather than home or supermarket shelves.

"Pantry pests usually enter the home in products purchased from the supermarket, so people tend to blame the retail stores," says Mark Graustein, University of Delaware extension specialist in entomology. "But most of the egg laying occurs when the unpackaged product is stored in bulk in a warehouse."

Graustein says that since the insects are in the egg or early larval stages when the product is packaged, there is no evidence of the pests. Once packaged, however, the insects continue their development, the population increases and real damage occurs to the food product.

"After they are fully grown and finished feeding, the larvae can bore their way out of the package,"

Graustein says. The holes may make it appear that the infestation started in the homeowner's pantry.

Only the most unsanitary conditions with lengthy storage would allow the spread of insects in a supermarket, Graustein says, because once packaged, stored foods are reasonably well protected from insect pests.

The most prevalent pantry pests in Delaware, based on telephone calls to county extension offices, are the Indian meal moth, the saw-toothed grain beetle and the flour beetle. They can infest any stored food but seem to prefer dried fruits, candy, moist and dry pet foods, cookies, flours, crackers and processed baking products.

Graustein says that cigarette and drugstore beetles also appear in Delaware and feed on spices, tobacco products and dried beans and peas. Other pests in this general category can infest such unlikely items as dried flower arrangements, ornamental gourds, book bindings and card-

board boxes.

"We've even found certain of these pests in insulation — the kind with a vapor barrier glued to the fiberglass," the specialist says. Less common to the area, he adds, is the pharaoh ant, which can enter the smallest of places and crawl under a snugly tightened lid.

The first step in controlling pantry pests is to toss out all obviously infested items. "Identifying these items is difficult because it's hard to tell if eggs have been deposited in apparently 'clean' products," the specialist says. "In general, any food item that could have been entered by an adult insect should be considered suspect."

When looking for pantry pests, don't overlook ornamental items such as spice wreaths or floral arrangements. These can be heated in the oven for at least 30 minutes at 130 degrees to kill insects or eggs. Large items require time to heat through completely. To avoid excessive moisture loss

while heating, place several layers of moistened newspaper on the shelf below the item. If the product cannot be heated, it can be placed in a freezer set at 0 degrees for at least seven days.

Once infested materials are removed, a thorough vacuuming and cleaning of the storage area with detergent or disinfectant should be all that is necessary for control.

"If a problem persists, some residual insecticide may be applied," says Graustein. To prepare for this, empty and clean the cabinet shelves. When the shelves are dry, spray upper and lower corner surfaces to force the insecticide into seams, cracks and

crevices. Do not spray food, dishes or utensils, and cover the shelves with shelf paper before replacing food and dishes.

The insecticide used should list one of the above mentioned pantry pests on its label and should include one of the following active ingredients: diazinon, propoxur (Baygon), chlorpyrifos (Dursban) or resmethrin (SBP-1382).

Graustein has one final suggestion. "Don't stock up on stored food products for at least a month after treating. If indeed you are bringing pantry pests home from your favorite supermarket, you will have less food to throw away and nearby items are less likely to become infested."



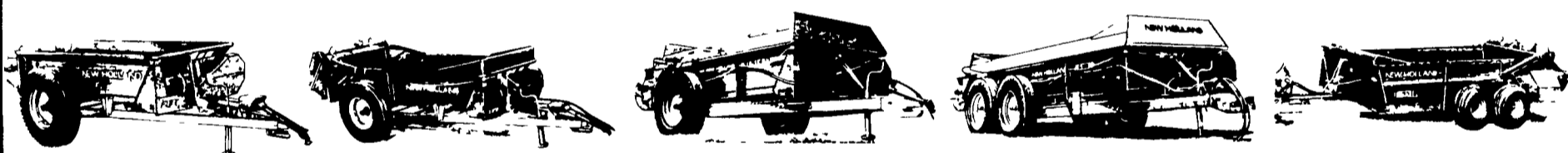
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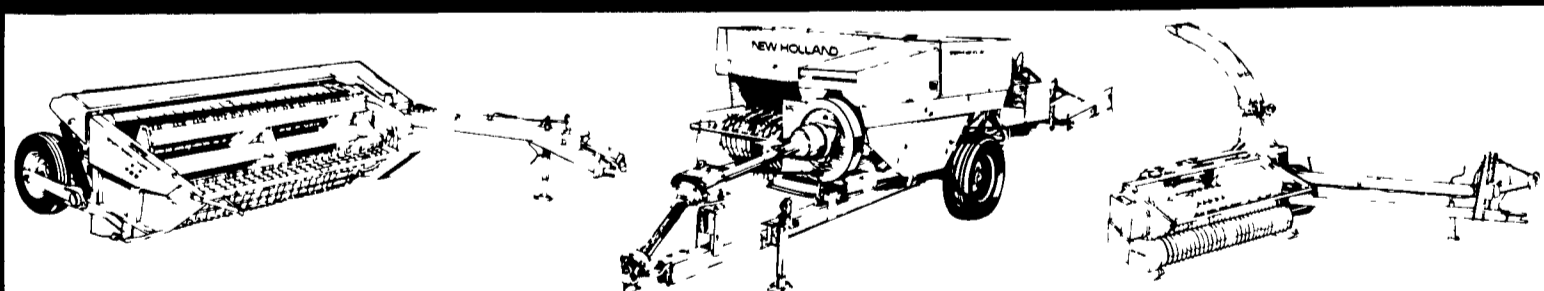


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