The house mouse (Mus musculus) is one of the most frequently encountered rodent pests found near people and buildings. Unchecked, it can become a long-term inhabitant of your home.

Less common rodent house guests include the Norway rat (Rattus norvegicus), deer mouse (Peromyscus maniculatus), and white-footed mouse (Peromyscus leucopus).

Together, mice, rats, and their parasites transmit dozens of diseases to humans; several pose serious health risks and some are potentially epidemic. House mice may also cause fires and incapacitate appliances by chewing on electrical wires. Their urine, musky odor, and gnawing can ruin food, clothing, papers, woodwork, insulation, and plumbing.

To evict mouse guests and prevent future invasions, use integrated pest management (IPM)—a sustainable approach that combines methods to minimize risks to human health and the environment. If you choose to hire a pest management professional, seek one who’s been certified by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, and request an IPM approach.

Step one: inspect your home

Management strategies differ slightly for mice and rats. Thorough monitoring will help you identify the species and find their hiding places and entrances.

Signs of rodent activity:

- Droppings and urine stains. The droppings of a house mouse are about 1/8 - 1/4" long. The droppings of a Norway rat’s fecal pellets are about 1/2 – 3/4" long, and may have pointed ends and are about 1/8 - 1/4" long.
- Burrow holes (shown actual size at left). Entrance holes to their burrows are typically one inch in diameter. But mice fit through dime-sized spaces that are only 1/4" high! Look in baseboards, corners, walls, entryways, and foundations.
- Runways, tracks, and “rub marks” (smudges). Mice have poor eyesight, so they tend to hug the walls during travel. They memorize routes between food and nest and rarely stray; this helps them run rapidly along a path, even in the dark. In time, a faint, dark “trail” of body oil and dirt may become visible on woodwork. In dirt or insulation, you may see a smooth, worn path. Shine a strong flashlight at a low angle across a dusty area to look for footprints.
- Noise. You may hear scuttling, squeaking, or gnawing inside the walls, especially at night. Other animals make similar noises, so this is not a definitive sign of rodent infestation. House pets may be disturbed by sounds of rodent activity that you cannot hear.
- Nesting and hiding places.
- Odors: Mice nest in any undisturbed location, often in wall cavities, attics, garages, and basements. Their nests are made of shredded fibrous materials such as cloth or paper, and are approximately 5" in diameter. Deer mice and white-footed mice line their nests with fur, feathers, shredded cloth, or other fine material. Droppings, seeds, and pet food will often be located near the nest.
- If there can be found a quiet spot in the kitchen, mice will often nest close to food. Check in and under cabinets, sinks, and appliances, behind and under refrigerators, stoves, and dishwashers, and wherever pipes or wires penetrate wall openings. Inspect stored clothes or bedding.

Step two: eliminate food and shelter

- Store food, bird seed, pet food, garbage, compost, and recyclables in secure metal, glass, ceramic, or heavy-duty plastic containers with tight-fitting lids. (Mice have strong teeth and can gnaw through wood, aluminum siding, sheetrock, lead or copper pipes, and plastic garbage cans).
- Keep birdfeeding areas clean of spilled seed.
- Clean garbage cans, dumpsters, and chutes regularly. Screen dumpster drainage holes with hardware cloth. (Mice can squeeze through 1/2" wire mesh).
- Feed pets at scheduled times. Put unfinished food in the refrigerator.
- Promptly clean up spills and crumbs.
- Elevate compost piles or enclose them with 1/2" wire mesh.

Remove their nesting sites.

- Inspect: Keep stored items off the floor. Reduce clutter. Remove cardboard boxes, if possible.

- Outsite: Move firewood, garbage cans, debris piles, discarded appliances, and vehicles away from the house. For easier inspection, maintain a wide-flare guarder barrier that’s free of vegetation around the foundation or keep plants closely trimmed.
Step three: evict them

Trapping. Snap trapping is recommended—but keep traps out of reach of children and pets. Try concealing snap traps inside coffee cans or PVC pipe. Set traps at night, when mice are most active, and check or remove them in the morning. Live traps should be checked morning and evening to prevent the animal(s) from dying of hunger, dehydration, or stress.

Live trapping with box traps or glue boards may be less than ideal, as mice can die of hunger, dehydration, or stress. Or remove them in the morning. Live traps should be set at night, when mice are most active, and check or remove them in the morning.

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Step four: exile them

Exlude mice from your home. Seal all of their points of entry from ground level to at least three feet high (to the roof, if possible)—because mice are good climbers. Prune branches away from the roof.

Space snap traps every 5-10 feet along the route. Set traps at night, when mice are most active, and check or remove them in the morning. Live traps should be set at night, when mice are most active, and check or remove them in the morning.

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