

# Clothes Moths

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**C**lothes moths, or clothing moth, larvae feed on a variety of dried animal protein like hair, feathers and hide; adult moths do not feed. Damage occurs when larvae feed on wool, upholstery, rugs, felt, dried skin, hair and similar materials but not synthetic fabrics, cotton and other plant based fabrics. Other fabrics may be damaged, however, if they are in contact with infested fabrics that are made of animal fibers.

There are several species of clothes moths including the casemaking clothes moth and the webbing clothes moth. All species have similar life histories. The adults are small buff-coloured moths but one species has dark spots on the wings. Female moths rarely fly so you won't find them fluttering around the house like the pantry-infesting moths.

Clothes moth larvae can do considerable damage to certain types of fabrics and other natural articles. Generally, only items in long-term storage or those that are not disturbed for long periods sustain damage. Items that are regularly used are or cleaned are much less likely to be infested.

## **CLOTHES MOTH LARVAE**

Some clothes moth larvae build a case made from silk and bits of whatever the larva is feeding on. This is the casemaking clothes moth and the case is carried wherever the larva goes, while other species do not make this case.

Clothes moth larvae are especially damaging to fabrics that has been stained or soiled, food stains, sweat and urine are especially attractive. In fact, there is evidence that clothes moth larvae will not develop on clean fabric because it lacks certain necessary nutrients. Therefore, always launder or dry clean clothes before putting them into long-term storage.

## **STORAGE**

Only use air-tight storage boxes or bags for long-term storage and store only clean clothes. This alone will



prevent most infestations. Infested closets and drawers should be emptied and thoroughly cleaned with a mild household cleaner. There is no need to treat indoor spaces with insecticide.

## **CLOTHES MOTH TRAPS**

Clothes moths are not attracted to light like other moths but instead tend to see darker areas or dim light. This behaviour makes them difficult to detect in dark closets and drawers. You'll probably notice fabric damage or larvae before you see the moths themselves.

If you suspect clothes moth, based on damage you find, use pheromone traps placed in the closet or drawer. These traps will capture male webbing clothes moths. Traps may not eliminate an infestation but will reduce numbers until you can take further action.

## **DO NOT USE MOTHBALLS**

Clothes moth infestations are not as common and damaging today as they once were. Nowadays most wool carpets have been replaced with synthetics and even wool clothing is not as common. Wool rugs and wall hangings are sometimes infested and/or damaged.

At one time clothes moth damage was so common and costly that

a material called mothballs was routinely placed in closets and drawers to deter these moths. However the use of mothballs is not recommended for fabric pests because of the toxicity of this material to people. Most infestations can be eliminated with proper storage and clean clothes combined with cleaning of closets and drawers, and trapping of male moths.

Mothballs are made of white crystals from very dangerous chemicals, naphthalene. This chemical is a fumigant and the vapours must be present in high concentrations to be effective and this is a problem. Naphthalene can damage the liver and cause eye injury. Mothballs can be especially dangerous if accidentally eaten. In short, mothballs should not be used by homeowners. If they are used, and unfortunately some will continue to use them, they should only be used sparingly and anything stored around mothballs should be thoroughly cleaned. Dry clean wool and silk articles or wash other fabrics to remove all mothball smell before use.

There are alternatives to mothballs for clothes moths and carpet beetles. Do not put clothes that have been worn in long-term storage. Dry cleaning is the most effective method of removing eggs and larvae of insects.