

Pantry Pests (Stored Product Pests)

(Indian meal moth – *Plodia interpunctella*; flour beetles, grain beetles, drugstore beetles and weevils)



Indian meal moth



Meal moth larvae (the ones that eat)



Red flour beetle

Identification – “Stored product pests” is the group name for the insects that live in dry food. The most common is the **Indian meal moth**, a small moth about 3/8 inch long with wings that are pale gray near the body and coppery-brown on the outer half. Its larvae are whitish caterpillars up to 1/2 inch that leave silk webbing in food. The beetles are tiny, about 1/10 to 1/7 inch: reddish-brown **flour beetles**, slender **sawtoothed and merchant grain beetles**, round **drugstore and cigarette beetles**, and **weevils** with a little snout.

Why they’re a problem – They contaminate food with their bodies, droppings and webbing, and spread from one package to the next. Meal moth larvae crawl out of the package to find a crack to spin a cocoon, then emerge as moths and fly to other rooms, so people find them in bathrooms and bedrooms far from the pantry. They don’t bite, and they don’t damage the house.

What we find – They’re almost always brought home in food from the store, often as eggs or larvae already in the package. We see them most with rice, flour, grains, beans, cereal, nuts, dried fruit, spices, birdseed and dry pet food, especially from bulk bins and specialty food stores. Some weevils develop inside the kernel, so the product was infested before it was packaged. Look for webbing, clumped food, tiny holes in packages, and cocoons in the corners of pantry walls and ceilings.

What works – **Find it, toss it, clean it.** The solution is the same for all of them: find and remove the infested product, clean the storage area thoroughly, and vacuum up the adults. **No pesticide treatment is recommended or effective** for pantry pests. Store-bought sprays mostly scatter them through the house and only kill what you hit directly, and nobody wants insecticide around food.

What you can do – Check every dry food item in the pantry and nearby cabinets, opened or not, and throw out anything with webbing, holes, larvae or adults. If you’re not sure about an item, freeze it for about a week. Then empty the shelves, vacuum all the cracks, corners and shelf supports, and wash everything down with hot soapy water, wiping away any cocoons on the walls and ceilings. Store dry goods in airtight glass, metal or hard plastic, because bags and cardboard won’t stop them. Don’t mix old and new food, inspect packages when you bring them home, and keep birdseed and pet food in sealed containers too. A pheromone trap for pantry moths will show whether any are left, but it won’t fix the problem.

When to call Dynamic – Give us a call if you’ve cleaned out the pantry and they keep showing up, or if you can’t find the source. If you’re not sure what you have, send us a photo and we’ll identify it for you.