Tips to pest proof your home for winter

Source: Zach DeVries, UK extension entomologist

We are not the only creatures that retreat indoors when the temperatures begin to drop. During this time of the year, many rodents and insects will start entering homes looking for a warm place to spend the winter. Below are some tips to keep them outdoors. Most hardware and home improvement stores will carry the tools and materials you need to get started.

1.Install door sweeps or thresholds at the base of all exterior doors. Lie on the floor and check for light leaks under doors. Gaps of one-sixteenth inch or smaller will allow insects and spiders inside, and spaces as small as the diameter of the pencil (about one-fourth inch), are large enough for mice. Pay attention to the door’s bottom corners, as this is often where rodents and insects enter. Fit garage doors with a rubber bottom seal. Close gaps under sliding glass doors by lining the bottom track with a foam weather stripping that is one-half- to three-fourths-inch wide.

1. Seal openings where pipes and wires enter the foundation and siding with mortar, caulk, urethane expandable foam or copper mesh. These are common entryways for ants, spiders, wasps, rodents and other pests.
2. Seal cracks around windows, doors, fascia boards, etc. Use a good quality silicone or acrylic latex caulk/sealant. Prior to sealing, clean cracks and remove any peeling caulk to help with adhesion. A key area to caulk on the inside of basements is along the top of the foundation wall where the wooden sill plate is attached.
3. Repair gaps and tears in screens to keep out cluster flies, lady beetles and other pests. Some insects are small enough to fit through a standard screen, and the only way to deny entry of these tiny creatures is to keep windows and doors closed during periods of adult fall emergence.
4. Install one-fourth-inch wire mesh (hardware cloth) over attic, roof and crawl space vents to prevent wildlife entry. Be sure to wear gloves when cutting and installing hardware cloth, because the wire edges are sharp. Backing the wire mesh from the inside with screening will give you extra protection against insects like ladybugs, paper wasps and yellow jackets. Invest in a chimney cap to exclude birds, squirrels, raccoons and other nuisance wildlife. Raccoons, in particular, are a serious problem throughout Kentucky. Many chimneys become home to a family of raccoons, which are often infested with fleas.
5. Consider applying an exterior insecticide treatment. While sealing openings is the more permanent way to pest proof, it is laborious and sometimes impractical. You can get the most from your barrier treatment by applying longer-lasting liquid formulations containing pyrethroids. Treat the base of all exterior doors, garage and crawl space entrances, around foundation vents and utility openings, up underneath siding and around the outside perimeter of the foundation.  Be sure to follow all label instructions. Do not apply indoor insecticides. While these may control the insects you can see, they are generally not a long-term solution, because these pests are coming in from the outside and will continue to do so until you stop their entrance.

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