



## AVOID UNINVITED FALL HOUSE GUESTS

The fall season is the time of year when many of us find ourselves with uninvited guests in the home. They include various insects, but the pests I want to discuss here today are the small, furry creatures known as rodents. These include mice, voles, shrews, and perhaps even a mole. These little animals are in search of both food and shelter for the coming colder months, which is why they are particularly bothersome during the fall.

Knowing that this is the time of year these creatures will begin to move indoors, you can take steps to try and avoid them becoming wintertime residents in the home. I'll discuss two of these rodents.

The house mouse is probably the most common of the rodent guests. They are small, graying-brown or black creatures about three to five inches long, with a gray or buff belly and a nearly hairless tail, with fairly prominent eyes and ears and a pointed nose. The house mouse usually lives in close proximity to homes and barns or commercial structures, and with the onset of cold weather, they try to move into more comfortable quarters, usually a heated structure.

The house mouse prefers seeds and grains, but is a browser, nibbling on whatever food happens to be available. It is this nibbling characteristic of theirs that causes so much damage. It isn't that they eat a lot, but that they eat a little of everything, and, therefore, cause widespread contamination. They seem to prefer foods that are high in fats and sugars, such as bacon and chocolate and they are very fond of dog, cat, and bird food, probably because these foods contain fats, proteins, and sugars. They will also damage containers and food packaging and can cause structural damage by gnawing on insulation, plastics, electrical wiring, and such. The house mouse can be especially destructive to stored items such as books, clothing, and heirlooms. It can also be a carrier of diseases and parasites that can be transmitted to humans, such as salmonellosis, ringworm, and tapeworms.

The white-footed deer mouse is a close relative of the house mouse. These creatures have a brownish back and white belly with white feet, thus its name. They have larger eyes and ears and are generally considered to be cuter than the house mouse. They prefer wooded or bushy areas, so are less likely to be found in more built up or residential areas. However, they too will venture into the house as cold weather arrives.

The deer mouse will also chew on and gather all types of material for making their nests, including plastics, cloth, insulation, and paper. They eat a wide variety of foods and will snack on just about anything they can find.

In addition to being transmitters of diseases like the house mouse, the deer mouse can also be a carrier of deer ticks, which can transmit Lyme disease.

Both house mice and deer mice are predominately nocturnal in habit, though they may occasionally be seen during the day. They are wary creatures, extremely agile, and can move quickly and jump from heights without harm. Generally, the same control methods will apply to both house and deer mice.

### CONTROLS:

First, attempt to rodent-proof your home or building. Using hardware cloth, cement, or flashing to block all entrances is a start. These little animals can get through a hole the size of a dime, so it is important to be thorough in blocking up even the smallest crack or crevice. Check for openings around drain pipes, electrical and water lines, and the dryer vent.

Second, use good sanitation practices by storing all foods in rodent-proof containers and keeping the area free of

*Building Strong and Vibrant New York Communities*

food scraps and crumbs. This includes left-overs in the dog and cat dishes. After they have eaten, clean up their left over food.

Third, consider using baits or snap traps to reduce or eliminate the rodents which find their way into the home. Bait traps with a very small amount of peanut butter. In fact, bait it and then wipe off the bait pad. This will prevent the rodent from licking off the bait and not springing the trap. Make them work for the bait. Using poison rodent baits is also effective, but may take some time, a lot of bait, and there is always a chance the poisoned rodent may die in the house or worse yet, wall. Be sure baits are not accessible to small children or pets. Be sure to read the label and follow directions. In truly severe infestations, you may want to consult a professional pest control service, found in the yellow pages. Plan now to avoid rodent problems later this fall and winter.