

Indian meal moth fact sheet

The Indian meal moth is one of the most common and troublesome of moths infesting stored food products. The caterpillars cause all of the damage. The larvae infest a wide variety of food products, especially those of plant origin. They have been found in stored grains, flour, cornmeal, nuts, dried fruits, powdered milk, candy, chilli pepper, fish food, dry dog and cat food, seeds, and chocolate.



Adult moths are about 3/8 inch long when at rest and have a 3/4-inch wingspread. The front wings are brick red on the outer two-thirds and light greyish brown on the inner one-third. The head and thorax are red brown and the hind wings are grey. Larvae are dirty white, often with a pinkish or greenish tint, and have brown heads. They are about 1/2 inch long when mature.

Life cycle

Females begin to lay eggs on larval food materials about three days after emergence. Each female can lay 200 to 400 eggs over a period of 1 to 18 days. The eggs hatch in 2 to 14 days and the larvae begin building the silk and frass tunnels in which they live and feed. Food products often become matted with their silken webbing. Larvae mature in 4 to 5 weeks and often wander away from the food source in search of pupation sites. The pupal period is about 2 weeks. The entire life cycle can be completed in 6 to 8 weeks under favourable conditions.

Dealing with the indian meal moth

Locate the source of the infestation! Carefully examine all susceptible foods and other stored products that may have been exposed to the infestation. This includes all pet foods and seeds. Do not overlook unopened paper and cellophane wrapped products, as the insects may even be found in these. You will probably want to throw away all infested products.

Remove all food, food containers and utensils from the infested areas and clean thoroughly, first with a vacuum cleaner and then with soap and water. Special attention should be paid to cracks, crevices and corners (including under and behind appliances) where bits of flour, meal or other food may have accumulated.