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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "ANOTHER FABRIC-EATER." Information from the Bureau of Entomology and Plant Quarantine, United States Department of Agriculture.

--ooOoo--

Wouldn't you think housewives had enough clothing problems in the spring without having insects to complicate matters? But right when women are busiest getting the family outfitted with new clothes for the season, the fabric-eating pests may be getting into their old clothes, or household fabrics. Apparently insects also are busy on spring days getting their families ready for the season. The clothes moths are looking for a home with a good food supply. And so are their little competitors, the carpet beetles. And the appetite these tiny insects have for clothes and furs and so on, you can't realize until you have had a visit from one of them.

The carpet beetle is the insect up for discussion today. Like so many other household pests, these beetles are immigrants from foreign shores. Needless to say, they all got in without passports, and belong to the class of undesirable aliens, for they have been making a lot of trouble in good American homes ever since they landed.

Like many another public enemy, they have several aliases. They go under the name of "buffalo bug" and also "buffalo moth." But they aren't moths at all, properly speaking. They simply resemble moths in appetite and some of their habits. Actually, they are bona fide beetles.

The entomologists say that we have now in this country at least 6 species of this beetle. (Awful thought!) But they say that only 4 species have proved serious household pests. (Four is bad enough!)

All species resemble clothes moths in their dietary habits. They thrive on fine fabrics of wool, hair, feathers, fur and even silk. They also can do very well on any dried animal remains.

All species pass through 4 life-cycles as moths do. The beetle begins life as a minute white egg of pinpoint size. It then hatches into a grub that does all the eating. When its appetite is satisfied, it goes into the sleeping or cocoon stage. And finally it emerges into the little beetle that flies and lays the eggs.

Each kind of carpet beetle differs somewhat in appearance naturally, but all have a general family resemblance. All are small -- never over a fourth of an inch in length; the adult beetles all are broadly oval, and have a black background mottled by different colored scales. The grubs are brownish or black and variously clothed with stiff hairs or with a long tuft of hairs at the end of the body.

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Suppose I introduce you now to some of the well-known members of the tribe. The common carpet beetle is a tiny mottled adult beetle and an oval furry reddish-brown grub. This member arrived during colonial days. His heyday was the period when most houses had tacked-down carpets on the floors -- the kind your grandmother only took up once a year at housecleaning time. Such carpets provided ideal homes for hungry young beetles that asked nothing more than a dark, warm, undisturbed place with plenty of food to eat. Tucked safely away under those appetizing and protecting wool carpets, the beetles prospered. They also often scattered about the house and found good lunches of wool clothing, furs, feathers and so on.

Nowadays when homes have fewer carpets and more polished floors and scatter-rugs and when we have newer cleaning methods, the carpet beetle doesn't have such an easy life. In fact, the time may be not far away when it will cease to be a household insect of importance.

Housekeepers can hasten that time and prevent trouble from these pests by frequent and thorough cleaning of clothes and fabrics, rugs, furs and so on, and by the use of the same substances that have proved effective against moths. There's comfort in knowing, also, that carpet beetles aren't so destructive as moths because they lay fewer eggs and take longer to grow.

The common carpet beetle nowadays gives the greatest trouble not only in rugs and carpets but also in clothes, especially those put away in trunks and chests and left undisturbed for a long time. Napthalene and paradichlorobenzene flakes are good protection for clothes in tight containers. The gas given off as these flakes evaporate penetrates the clothing and poisons any stage of the beetle that happens to be lurking in the clothes.

But if carpet beetles have a head start under your rugs or in your clothes closet, these flakes are not an effective remedy. Here fumigation is the quickest and surest treatment. Next best is thorough cleaning of the closet and thorough cleaning, brushing, sunning, and shaking of the clothes along with some kerosene treatment for cracks and crannies where the beetles may be hiding.

A second member of the carpet beetle tribe is the black carpet beetle. This is the beetle whose grub is long, slender golden-brown, with a tuft of golden bristles, who likes especially to hide in cracks.

The furniture carpet beetle, the latest-comer to this country, fortunately hasn't spread very widely yet. I say fortunately, for this beetle has proved most destructive of all. It is a European pest, first found in Washington in 1915, and very harmful to upholstering and all other susceptible fabrics, also to brushes, furs, carpets and rugs.

Listeners, when all is said and done, you can hardly beat cleanliness as a good and cheap way to protect your possessions against any fabric-eating pest. For clothes or fabrics stored in tight containers, napthalene and paradichlorobenzene give added protection. Fumigation will rid a house of these pests but should be done by experts.

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