

# Controlling Cockroaches

A big part of cockroach control is cleanliness. When food is left for them, cockroaches will become numerous. Dinner scraps, unwashed dishes, uncovered trash or poorly wiped tables all provide food for cockroaches. Pet food left out over night may become a meal for cockroaches. Leaking pipes and faucets can provide moisture for cockroaches and should be repaired. To avoid bringing cockroaches into the home, check bags and boxes of groceries when unpacking.

Another important part of cockroach control is eliminating the cracks and crevices in which they can hide. Seal cracks between the walls and counters or cabinets, seal gaps around pipes and close spaces between woodwork. Places where cockroaches have been found hiding should be repaired whenever possible. A lot of cockroach control can be done with caulk and tools.

Finally, where there are many cockroaches, insecticides might be needed to help reduce their numbers. Several very good products are available. An insect growth regulator (IGR) has proven very effective for cockroach control. This chemical prevents the cockroach from becoming an adult and stops their breeding. IGRs last for several months, work in very small amounts and are very safe to people and pets. IGRs are available

in most stores and may be sold as birth control for cockroaches.

Boric acid also works well. This powder is placed in cracks where cockroaches hide or on surfaces where they walk. Boric acid for cockroach control is a fine powder made for this purpose. The type sold for medical use will not work.

Bait stations are also available. These are small plastic containers that have insecticide inside. It lasts for several months. It is relatively safe because the insecticide is sealed inside. They can be placed beneath sinks, behind appliances or other places where cockroaches are hiding.

Other insecticides may also be used. Some insecticides, like pyrethrin, are used to flush cockroaches from their hiding places or kill cockroaches when sprayed on them but will not last long. Other insecticides last longer and can be applied to places where cockroaches will rest or walk.

It is important to follow label directions carefully when using any insecticides.

# Cockroaches



# Some Facts

## NEED MORE INFORMATION?

Contact your local health department or the Public Health Pest Management Section at (919) 733-6407.



N.C. Department of Environment  
and Natural Resources  
Division of Environmental Health  
Public Health Pest Management Section  
<http://www.deh.enr.state.nc.us/phpm/index.htm>

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Cockroaches are commonly found in our homes and workplaces. Because cockroaches are so comfortable living with people, it is hard to control them unless you know some facts about them.

## **C**ockroach Biology

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The cockroach has three stages in its life cycle - egg, nymph and adult. Eggs are grouped together in a small bean-shaped capsule that is produced by the female. This capsule is usually left in a protected place or may be carried by some types of cockroaches until it hatches.

Depending upon the type of cockroach, 10 to 30 nymphs hatch from the egg capsule. Nymphs look like small, wingless adults. Over a period of weeks, the nymphs grow larger and become sexually mature adults.

Cockroaches are active at night. When cockroaches are seen during the day, it is a sign that many more are hiding. Cockroaches prefer to hide in tight places, like cracks in walls, gaps in joints, or under piles of trash. They are attracted to dark, warm, humid, places and are common in kitchens, bathrooms and basements. They like to group together and will often produce a musty smell.

Cockroaches will feed on almost anything. There are several types of cockroaches often found in and around North Carolina

homes.

The most common cockroach found in North Carolina homes is the German cockroach (*Blattella germanica*). It is about a half of an inch long and brown in color with two dark stripes near the head. It usually takes three to four months to grow from egg to adult. Adults have wings but seldom fly. This cockroach can become very numerous in homes.

The American cockroach (*Periplaneta americana*) is the largest cockroach found in North Carolina homes. It is about one and a half inches long and dark brown in color with some light brown coloring near the head. It prefers moist places; it is usually found in basements, under sinks or in sewers. It has wings but usually does not fly. It takes a year to grow from egg to adulthood.

The Oriental cockroach (*Blatta orientalis*) may sometimes be found in homes. It is brownish black and about three-quarters of an inch in length. Females have almost no wings; the male's wings are very short. This cockroach may be found outdoors under woodpiles, in leaf litter, animal waste or sewers. This cockroach may take a year or longer to grow from egg to adulthood.

The smoky brown cockroach (*Periplaneta fuliginosa*) is about the same size as the American cockroach, but it is a very dark brown color and does not have any light brown markings near the head. The smoky brown breeds mainly outdoors in woody areas. It can be found under logs or in leaf litter. The smoky brown often enters homes through openings,

air vents and under doors.

During the summertime, people will often notice 'wood roaches', which may invade homes from nearby woods. The males, which are about one half inch long and light brown in color, are good fliers. They are attracted to lights in the evening. The females have small wings and remain in the woods. This cockroach may come indoors, but it doesn't breed inside.

The brown banded cockroach (*Supella longipalpa*) resembles the German cockroach but has two light bands across the wings and a single dark patch near the head. It breeds indoors; it is not very common.

## **C**ockroaches and Disease

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Cockroaches can carry many bacteria and viruses on their bodies, but it is not proven that they will transmit disease. When feeding, cockroaches will walk, spit and defecate on the food. Large numbers of cockroaches can produce an odor. Allergies to cockroach droppings or the remains of dead cockroaches can occur. Large numbers of cockroaches are usually a sign of poor sanitation.