

# 6 pest control tips for pet owners

Get rid of the creepy-crawlies without harming your precious pet.

**O**h no! You hear the scurry of little mouse feet or see a trail of ants marching across your kitchen floor. Here are some tips for ridding your home of these unwanted guests while keeping your pets safe.

## 1. Pull up the welcome mat

Start by making your home less hospitable to unwanted guests. Identify and remove sources of food that could call to insects or mice. Fill holes, cracks and other openings in your home where pests can enter. Eliminate areas of standing water around your home that encourage mosquito breeding. Frequent housecleaning, including vacuuming and washing bedding, are important, especially when it comes to flea infestations in the home.

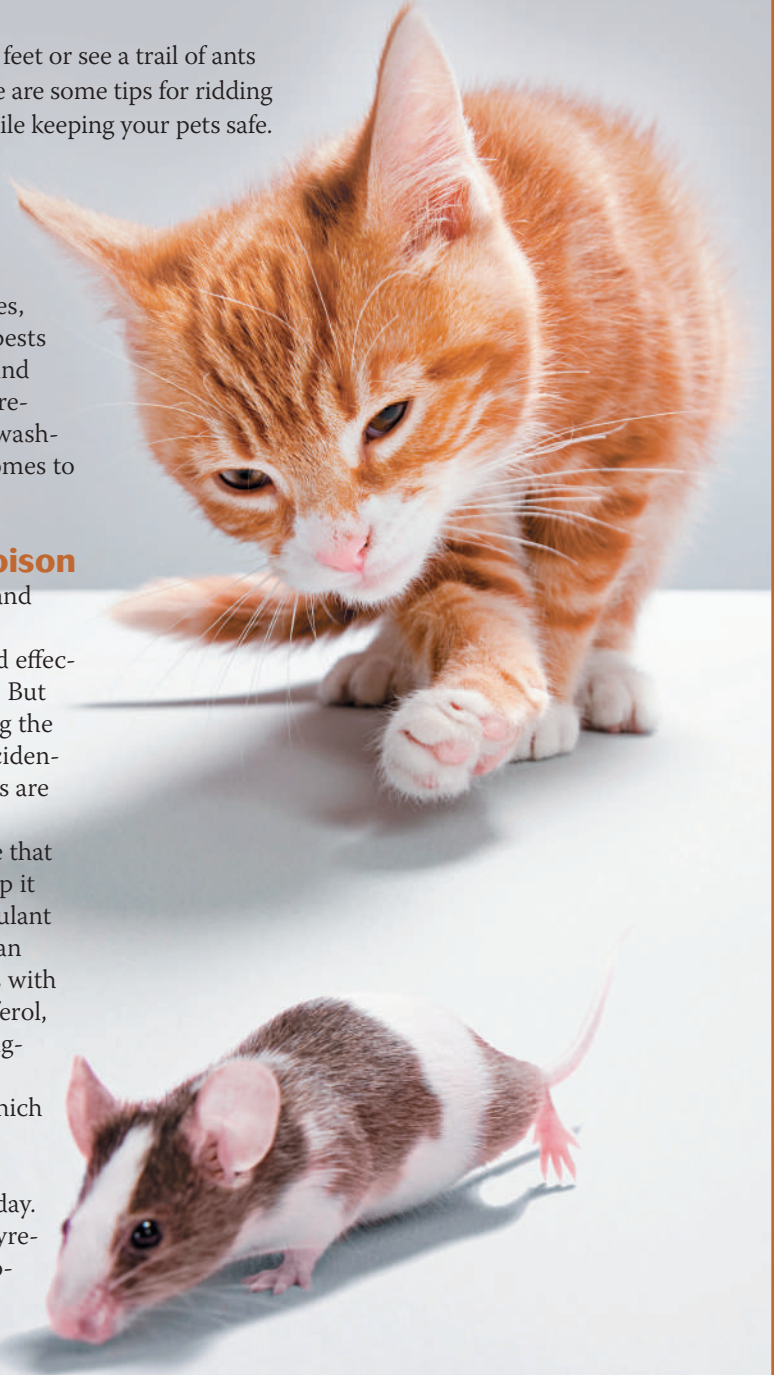
## 2. If prevention fails, pick your poison

It's important to choose pesticides thoughtfully and ensure safe placement if you have pets.

For rodents, snap mousetraps can be a safe and effective choice when there are also pets in the home. But keep traps out of reach of pets and consider using the enclosed type of trap so a curious pet doesn't accidentally snap their nose or paw in the trap. Live traps are another option for rodent control.

If you choose to use rodent poisons, select one that has an antidote, always use bait stations, and keep it in areas that pets can't access. With the anticoagulant class of rodenticides, vitamin K1 can be used as an antidote—this is a safer option than rodenticides with the active ingredients bromethalin or cholecalciferol, which do not have an antidote and can cause long-lasting harm when consumed by pets. Look for ingredients like bromadiolone or difethialone, which are anticoagulant rodenticide ingredients with a wider margin of safety.

There are lots of insecticides on the market today. Low concentration borates, low concentration pyrethroids, fipronil, neonicotinoids such as imidacloprid, and hydramethylnon are some safer insecticide choices if you have pets. Always follow



the label instructions, use bait stations and prevent pet access to insecticides.

Mosquito and other insect control products that contain a type of bacteria called *Bacillus thuringiensis* are safe and effective options for use around pets. This type of bacteria kills insect larvae but doesn't grow in a pet's body and does not cause infection or illness in pets that accidentally consume it.

### 3. Natural choices are not always the safest or most effective options for pets

You may read about natural pest control options, but they may not always be the safest choice for pets or the most effective option for pest infestations. Natural choices can still result in adverse effects when pets are exposed, and caution is still necessary.

Garlic, which is often touted as an insect repellent, has the potential to cause gastrointestinal distress. And if a large amount is ingested, it can also cause damage to red blood cells and anemia in pets. Cats are most sensitive to garlic, but dogs can also become ill if they consume enough. Garlic does not kill insects and its efficacy as a repellent is questionable.

Tea tree oil and other essential oils are also commonly advertised as natural insect repellents but can be a toxic concern for pets, especially in their concentrated forms. Application of concentrated tea tree oil can cause lethargy, uncoordinated gait, weakness and tremors in dogs and cats, and cats can also develop liver damage. Cats tend to be especially sensitive to essential oils and have developed signs including vomiting, drooling, oral irritation and burns, lethargy and liver damage with exposure to concentrated essential oils. It's always best to check with a veterinarian when considering use of essential oils on or around pets, as some essential oils are more toxic than others.

Diatomaceous earth is a powder made from the ground fossilized remains of tiny aquatic organisms called diatoms and is often recommended as a natural insecticide. It contains a large amount of silica and is not usually considered harmful when ingested, but inhalation can cause damage to the lungs of pets, especially with heavy and chronic exposure. It shouldn't be used around pets with preexisting respiratory disease, such as cats with feline asthma. It can also be irritating and drying to the skin and eyes. Diatomaceous earth is thought to work by drying out and abrading the exoskeleton of insects, but its efficacy is questionable.

### 4. Follow the package directions and then save the package

No one likes reading the fine print on product labels, but when using pesticides around the home, it's important to read and follow the label directions. Keep pets out of the area during application. Concentrated products should be properly diluted and wet products should be allowed to dry before pets are reintroduced to the area. Keep pets out of storage areas where they might access containers.

It's important to know exactly what products you use around the home in case pets are accidentally exposed. Many rodenticides have a similar appearance but may require very different treatments by your veterinarian. Formulations of products change, so unfortunately internet identification is not an accurate way to confirm the active ingredient in a product, especially if it's an older formula. The best way to identify a product in case of accidental ingestion is the original package.

### 5. Use those bait stations

Many rodenticides, ant baits and roach baits come in or with a bait station. Use them if you have pets! While it is still possible for dogs to chew into plastic bait stations, they work well to limit exposure and decrease the risk of poisoning. Bait stations contain a specific amount of bait and limit how much a pet can ingest. A dog can quickly consume many blocks of rodenticide from a plastic bag, cardboard box or from the yard if scattered loose. But if dogs chew into a bait station, you may be able to catch them and stop them before they consume the bait inside. Or at least you will know that they have ingested a limited quantity.

Bait stations also have labeling to help you identify the active ingredient if a pet gets into a pesticide, and they help to prevent rodents or insects from moving bait around the home.

### 6. If all else fails, go to the professionals

If these tips don't work, it's time to bring in professionals. Pest control companies can be a great resource to help identify problems and make your home less welcoming to unwanted insects and rodents. Find a pest control company that has experience treating homes with pets to help choose effective pest management for your situation and minimize your pet's risk.

Your veterinarian can also offer suggestions about which products are safest with your pet's health in mind.