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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Tuesday, June 14, 1932.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "What to do About Moths in Furniture." Information from the Bureau of Entomology and the Bureau of Home Economics, U.S.D.A.

Back in April, you'll remember, we had two chats about clothes moths. But still the questions keep coming in asking what to do to get rid of them. Lately there have been several inquiries about moths in overstuffed furniture.

In these thrifty times, control of moths is worth considering from the standpoint of economy. Did you ever think what costly damage they do every year in this country? I read the other day that the loss they caused is estimated at four hundred million dollars a year. That's a figure worth some serious thought, isn't it?

And even then, it's impossible to sum up our individual losses. Those holes in the front of Janet's winter coat may mean that she must have a new one long before one was due. That's an indirect money loss. And so on down through our sweaters, wool scarfs, wool dresses and other clothes, as well as our blankets, rugs and upholstered furniture.

Yet simple and effective control measures worked out by the entomologists would if applied in homes, stores and factories the country over, mean a saving of enormous sums each year.

Some of the worst and most costly damage from moths comes in furniture. Once moths settle down to make their home in an overstuffed chair or sofa with a covering of mohair or woolen tapestry, then it's likely to be good-bye to the lovely cover.

The problem here is more difficult than with clothing. You see, moths usually attack clothes only when they are stored or put away where they aren't being disturbed. Clothes are safe if they are in daily use. But not so with upholstered furniture. Your best chair or your handsome davenport, which you use every day, may become badly infested right under your nose.

Here again it's the little worms or the larvae that do the damage. They hatch from eggs laid by moth millers, and as soon as they hatch, they begin to eat the food they like--woolen fibers, or feathers, or sometimes

even the hair filling in the furniture. The moth millers we see flitting about deposit their eggs in the pile of the fabric covering. Sometimes they crawl down between the cushions or into crevices along the seams and lay their eggs.

Now the question is: What to do to keep moths out of upholstered furniture?

Here's an answer from Dr. A.E. Back of the Bureau of Entomology: "For one thing, brush it or go over it with a vacuum cleaner very often. This removes or kills the moth eggs and worms. If you have slip covers on your furniture, take them off every now and then and go over the surface of the upholstery, especially along the seams and down in the cracks and crevices. Moths are protected under slip covers and enjoy working there."

This brushing and cleaning with a vacuum cleaner helps keep the moths from getting down into the upholstery and gets rid of any that are eating the pile on the surface of the fabric cover. But a more serious situation comes up if the moth larvae get underneath. There they cut the woolen threads of the warp and do great damage. When moths get inside upholstered furniture there are two things you can do - apply a liquid spray or fumigate. Maybe you have a local firm that makes a business of fumigating furniture. If not, you can do it yourself.

The idea of fumigating seems like a complicated job, but Dr. Back says it isn't difficult. He says the simplest way to do it is this: Put the furniture in a room not constantly in use and sprinkle three or four pounds of paradichlorobenzene over the fabric covering and down around the cushions. Yes, that word was paradichlorobenzene. I know it's seven syllables long, but I'm told it's just as effective as it is lengthy, so never mind if it is a jaw-breaker. Well, once you have shaken the paradichlorobenzene crystals over the furniture, wrap each chair or sofa up in a heavy blanket or canvas. Never mind if it looks like a ghost or a Sheik of Araby. The idea is to cover the furniture so that the fumes from the crystals will settle thickly all over the fabric and upholstery stuffing. When you have wrapped the furniture up, let it stand undisturbed in this room for about a week. This isn't perfect treatment, Dr. Back says, but it is a cheap, safe treatment of real practical value. It's best to do this fumigating during warm summer weather, or when the temperature of the room is 70 degrees or above.

Another way to battle with these moths in furniture is to use a liquid spray. One of the oil sprays such as you purchase at the drug store is good, if it consists largely of light mineral oil. Of course, you must apply it forcefully to make it effective. It will kill practically all the moth worms on or beneath the covers. It will even kill the worms hiding in the stuffing, if sprayed on with considerable pressure.

Dr. Back also suggests that you can do a combined job of fumigating, if you like. You can treat your furniture, clothes and rugs together. Choose for this job a small room or large closet--say 12 by 15 by 15 feet. Close up the windows and wedge them tight. Spread papers on the floor. Assemble in this room your pieces of upholstered furniture as well as your rugs and clothing. Then sprinkle around on the papers on the floor 8 to 10 pounds of either naphthalene flakes or paradichlorobenzene crystals. Close the room up tight even to the crack under the door and leave it undisturbed.

What could be simpler?

This seems to be an effective way of keeping moths inactive if not of killing them outright. There's no fire risk attached to it and the crystals do no harm to the rugs and furnishings.

And there's another point Dr. Back makes about treating moths in the home. He believes that it's best to stick to chemicals that are non-inflammable, easy to handle and fairly inexpensive. The two good ones that measure up to this standard are the ones we have just spoken about--naphthalene and paradichlorobenzene. Both these come in the form of white crystals and a pound of either of them, Dr. Back says, will protect a trunkful of clothes during the summer. By the way, sometimes paradichlorobenzene is sold under the name of dichloride or paradi.

The cost of these chemicals is so slight compared with the value of the woollens you are trying to protect that it's probably a good idea to give your garments an over-dose of them. They evaporate gradually and it is the fumes that keep the moth eggs from hatching and kill the larvae before they can do any damage.

These are some of the simple and effective ways Dr. Back suggests for reducing our national bill for moth damage. If you want more information, there are two bulletins to help you. One is called "Clothes Moths and Their Control." The other is called "The Control of Moths in Upholstered Furniture." Either one of these --or both-- are yours for the asking, as long as the Department of Agriculture supply lasts.

Another bug that sometimes causes a lot of damage to fabrics in the household is the carpet beetle, sometimes called the buffalo moth. I'll be talking about that pest some day soon. But in the meantime I may as well mention that there's a bulletin on the carpet beetle available now if you want it. In it, you'll find helpful information on how to control this pest, whether he's eating your best parlor rug or attacking Aunt Sally's fur tippet.

If it's easier, you can order these bulletins by number: Clothes Moths and Their Control--Farmers' Bulletin 1353-F.
Control of Moths in Upholstered Furniture--Farmers' Bulletin 1655-F.
Carpet Beetles and Their Control--Farmers' Bulletin 1346-F.

Tomorrow I'm going to give you a new recipe just worked out at the Bureau of Home Economics for banana fritters. And then two luncheon menus in which these fritters are used. In the first menu, the fritters are part of the main course. In the second, they are dessert.

