

LivingWithBugs Guide

identification, life cycles and management

Indian Meal Moth

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This moth is a serious pest of many stored food products worldwide.

It may be the most common food-infesting moth in homes, stores and warehouses. Dry pet food, nuts and seeds, dried fruit and coarse grains are favorites of this moth. Infestations of stored foodstuffs are characterized by surface webbing produced by the larvae. Adult moths (Fig. 1) are about 5/8" (16 mm) across the wings. Their wings have a broad, dark, coppery-colored band. Larvae (Fig. 2; worms) are cream-colored with a distinct head capsule.

Larvae develop from eggs laid on the foodstuff. Larval development is dependent on food quality and temperature. One to many generations can occur every year depending on conditions. Larvae may wander away from the food source at the end of their development.

Controlling stored product pests with insecticides is very difficult and not recommended for homeowners because of the proximity of food to the applied poisons. Most of the time stored product pests can be dealt with by homeowners with proper sanitation and attention to how packages

are sealed and stored. Use heavy plastic or glass containers. Most importantly, don't store susceptible foodstuff longer than about two months unless you freeze it first.

Pheromone traps are available for Indian meal moth and are very effective for pinpointing infestations. Once "hotspots" are defined you can concentrate on finding the infestation and discarding infested material. Over time this method will eliminate the moths without insecticides.



Figure 1. Adult Indian meal moth. About 1/2" long. Original photo by Ken Gray.

See www.LivingWithBugs.com for additional information.



Figure 2. Indian meal moth larva on dried fruit. Original photo by Ken Gray