

House Calls

By Rosemary Carstens

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Q: We have a mouse in the house! How can we control rodent infestation naturally and humanely?

Q: Prevention is key. Mice cause almost as much damage and are as great a health hazard as the rat. Public Affairs Director Cindy Mannes, of the National Pest Management Association, recently stated that “rodents are known to carry and spread as many as 200 human pathogens, making them a very real threat to the health of American families.”

Your best defense is to limit access: Weatherstrip doors and windows, patch foundation cracks, caulk around pipes, and cover vents with screening.

Rid your property of enticements. Raise woodpiles off the ground and place them well away from the house. Trim away tall grass and weeds. Use garbage containers with tight-fitting lids. Eliminate leaky taps, sweating pipes, and open drains. Keep a clean kitchen; dry goods should be stored in metal or glass.

Dr. Robert Corrigan, rodent control specialist and urban entomologist, feels the most “humane approach for killing house mice is to use over-the-counter mouse bait. These work on the blood system (not the nervous system), and thus the pain centers are not involved. . . this approach is far superior to what the mouse will suffer via snap, glue, and live traps.”

An important note: When dealing with rodents or their droppings, wear rubber gloves and a dust mask. Don't sweep or vacuum dry droppings, but dampen them with a bleach and water solution, then wipe up. Wash hands and exposed clothing thoroughly afterward.

Q: I love candlelight but am concerned about toxic emissions—what are my safest choices?

A: Candles are now available in all shapes, sizes, and types, scented or unscented, and made from an assortment of materials ranging from paraffin and gel to beeswax and soy. As a consumer, there are a few things you need to know to select and use them properly.

Studies have found that burning candles with lead core wicks can result in indoor air concentrations of lead above EPA-recommended thresholds, and at least one study showed concentrations of acrolein, formaldehyde, and acetaldehyde exceeding EPA standards. As Ron Schiller, Indoor Air Coordinator in the EPA's Denver office, says, “Scented candles and those with lead wicks can release chemicals into the air and are

best avoided.” The National Candle Association (NCA) states that most U.S. manufacturers no longer use lead wicks, but some do, and there are many imported candles on the market. It can be difficult to tell one metal from another visually; best to be safe and choose candles with cotton wicks.

Since paraffin is petroleum-based, some consumers prefer candles made of beeswax or soy. Both are all natural, non-toxic, non-polluting, non-allergenic, and are renewable resources. Makers of these candles claim they burn brighter and longer than others.

One last caution—remember, you are playing with fire and should never leave candles burning unattended.

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