

IN-DEPTH GUIDE

Cockroaches: the complete homeowner's guide

Everything a homeowner needs in one place, based on public guidance from the U.S. EPA and CDC, with links to every source.

PestGuardCo.com · To reach an independent local pest control company, call (855) 424-9709.

> Plain-language summary of public guidance from the U.S. EPA and CDC · Updated November 2026

Check these first

1. **Turn the kitchen light on suddenly at night** and watch where they run.
2. **Look under the sink**, behind the fridge and stove, and inside the dishwasher door edges.
3. **Check for droppings** that look like pepper or coffee grounds in drawers and cabinet corners.
4. **Look for egg cases**: small brown capsules in cracks and hinges.
5. **Notice a musty, oily smell** in cabinets. It points to a bigger group.

6 **Check for leaks and damp spots.** Roaches need water every day.

If you see this, it usually means...

IF YOU SEE

Small tan roaches in the kitchen and bathroom

IT USUALLY MEANS

Likely German cockroaches, which breed indoors

NEXT STEP

Act now. They multiply fast.

IF YOU SEE

Large reddish roaches, mostly at night or after rain

IT USUALLY MEANS

Likely American or other outdoor roaches coming in

NEXT STEP

Seal gaps, check drains, and reduce moisture.

IF YOU SEE

Roaches seen during the day

IT USUALLY MEANS

Often a sign of a large group

NEXT STEP

This usually needs a pest control company.

IF YOU SEE

Droppings in drawers but few roaches seen

IT USUALLY MEANS

They're hiding nearby in cracks

NEXT STEP

Clean, then set sticky traps to see where they're coming from.

IF YOU SEE

Roaches near drains

IT USUALLY MEANS

Coming up from plumbing or damp areas

NEXT STEP

Keep drains covered at night and fix leaks.

How to tell what you have

German cockroach

Small, about 1/2 in., tan with two dark stripes behind the head.

Lives and breeds indoors, mostly in kitchens and bathrooms.

vs

American cockroach

Large, about 1.5 in., reddish-brown.

Lives in sewers, basements and outdoors; wanders inside, especially after rain.

SIZE

German 1/2 in.; American up to 2 in.

COLOR

Tan to reddish-brown

WHERE

Kitchens, bathrooms, behind appliances

WHEN

All year, worse in heat

Which roach is it?

German cockroaches are small and tan with two dark stripes behind the head. They live and breed indoors, multiply quickly and are the ones most often found in kitchens and bathrooms.

American and other larger roaches are reddish-brown and live mainly outdoors, in sewers and basements. They wander in, especially after heavy rain or in hot weather. The response is different: seal and dry for the big ones; clean, bait and follow up for German roaches.

Starve them out, dry them out, keep them out

EPA's approach to pests like roaches is simple: remove food, water and shelter. Store food in sealed containers, clean up crumbs and spills right away, and don't leave food or dishes out overnight.

Fix leaky plumbing and don't let water collect in trays under houseplants or the refrigerator. Seal cracks and openings around baseboards, pipes and cabinets so they have fewer places to hide.

Baits before sprays

EPA notes that after prevention steps, baits are a good first line of chemical defense against insects. Baits placed in cracks where roaches travel let them carry the product back to where they hide.

Keep baits away from children and pets, and don't spray other products over them. If you hire a company, ask them to find and correct the source of the problem, like a leak, not just treat.

Why foggers don't fix it

Total-release foggers spread pesticide over open surfaces, but roaches hide deep in cracks, so the fog rarely reaches them. EPA has safety guidance on foggers because misuse can cause fires and illness.

Targeted baits and sealing usually work far better with much less exposure for your family.

What to do and what to avoid

Do

- Clean crumbs, grease and spills, especially behind and under appliances.
- Put food in sealed containers and don't leave dishes or pet food out overnight.
- Fix dripping faucets and leaks under sinks; wipe sinks dry at night.
- Take out trash every night and keep a tight lid on the can.
- Set sticky traps under sinks and behind appliances to see where they're coming from.

Avoid

- ✕ Don't use foggers or "bug bombs". They don't reach roaches hiding in cracks and can be a fire and health risk.
- ✕ Don't spray store-bought spray on top of baits. It can make roaches avoid the bait.
- ✕ Don't use outdoor products indoors.
- ✕ Don't put baits where kids or pets can get to them.

Health and safety

- Cockroach droppings and body parts can trigger allergies and asthma, especially in children.
- Roaches walk through drains and trash and can carry germs onto food and surfaces.
- Wash food-prep surfaces before use if you've seen roaches.

Prevention checklist

- Keep kitchens clean and dry, especially at night.
- Seal cracks around baseboards, pipes and cabinets with caulk.
- Fix leaks and reduce humidity in bathrooms and basements.
- Check grocery bags, boxes and used appliances before bringing them in.
- Store cardboard off the floor; roaches hide in it.
- Keep outdoor trash cans away from doors.

When to call a pro

Call a pro if you see roaches during the day, find them in several rooms, or still see them after two weeks of cleaning and baits.

1

Inspection

Finding where they hide, how many there are, and where water and food are getting to them.

2

Baits and growth regulators

Gel baits in cracks and products that stop young roaches from maturing.

3

Sealing and cleaning advice

Pointing out gaps, leaks and food sources to fix.

4

Follow-up

A return visit to check traps and re-bait. Roach problems usually need more than one visit.

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Questions

Why do I see roaches in a clean kitchen?

Roaches can come in from neighbors, drains, deliveries and outdoors. Leaks and small crumbs behind appliances are often enough to keep them around.

Are roaches during the day a bad sign?

Usually, yes. Roaches prefer the dark, so daytime sightings often mean a large group is crowded out of hiding spots.

How fast do German cockroaches spread?

Quickly. One female produces many young in a few months, which is why acting early matters.

Do I need to leave the house for treatment?

Usually not for baits. Ask the company what they'll use and how to prepare.

Sources

Preventing Pests at Home (fact sheet, PDF) (https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2014-01/documents/preventpest.pdf) **U.S. EPA**

Do You Really Need to Use a Pesticide? (https://www.epa.gov/safepestcontrol/do-you-really-need-use-pesticide) **U.S. EPA**

Do's and Don'ts of Pest Control (https://www.epa.gov/safepestcontrol/dos-and-donts-pest-control) **U.S. EPA**

Citizen's Guide to Pest Control and Pesticide Safety (https://www.epa.gov/safepestcontrol/citizens-guide-pest-control-and-pesticide-safety) **U.S. EPA**

Got Pests? Control Them Safely (https://www.epa.gov/safepestcontrol/got-pests-control-them-safely) **U.S. EPA**

This guide is PestGuard's own plain-language summary of public guidance from U.S. government agencies (EPA and CDC). U.S. federal government publications are generally in the public domain; follow the links to read the originals. It is general information, not an official government publication and not a substitute for an inspection. If you use any pest control product, read and follow the label. In an emergency, call 911. For pesticide questions, the National Pesticide Information Center can help: 1-800-858-7378.