



Information

Bohart Museum of Entomology

No. 028

Carpet Beetles

Carpet beetles (family Dermestidae) are small insects that can cause serious damage to fabrics, carpets, furs, stored foods, and even preserved insect specimens in museums. There are three common species of carpet beetles in California: the varied carpet beetle (*Anthrenus verbasci*), the black carpet beetle (*Attagenus mezatoma*), and the furniture beetle (*Anthrenus flavipes*).

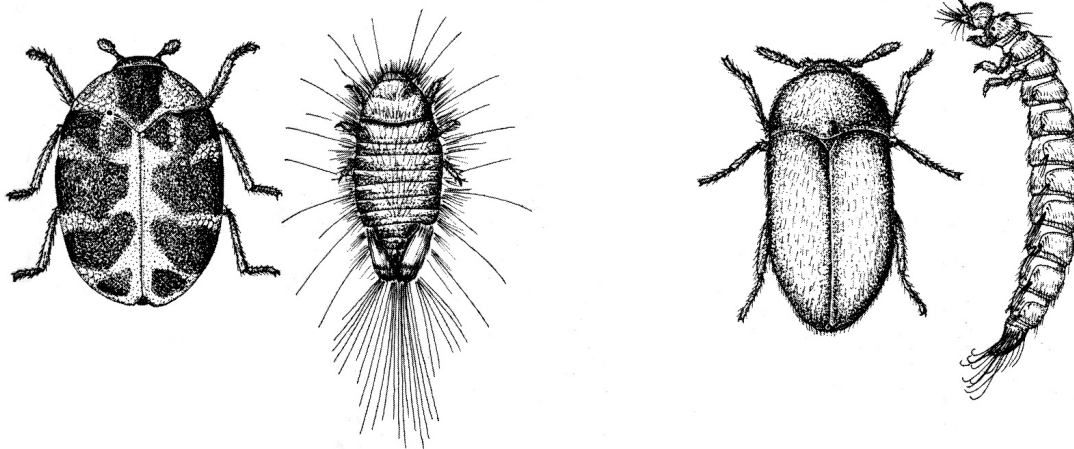
All carpet beetle damage is caused by the larval (immature) stage of the insect. The larvae are dark colored, usually about ¼ of an inch long, and are densely covered in tufts of hair. When disturbed, they may extend these plumes of hair straight out, causing them to look like a round ball of fur. Adult carpet beetles are about ¼ inch long, and may be solid black or black and white patterned, depending on the species. Adults feed on living vegetation, and are common in gardens, but they do not need to feed in order to start producing eggs.

Adult carpet beetles will lay eggs on any substrate suitable for their young, including wool carpets and other wool products, furs, hides, horns, feathers, hair, silk, cereals, stored grains, and fabrics such as cotton or linen that are soiled with food waste. Females can lay from 40 to 90 eggs, and the eggs hatch in one to three weeks. The larvae will travel from room to room, feeding on the mentioned products, and living behind baseboards, molding, or in heating ducts, furniture, and carpets. Larval development can last 3 to 36 months, depending on the temperature and the food supply. During the course of their development the larvae will

molt (shed their skin) from 5 to 12 times. People often notice the cast skins before seeing the living larvae themselves. As with all beetles, the carpet beetles go through a pupal stage before attaining adulthood. Adults typically leave a house and forage in nearby gardens before or after laying eggs. Adult beetles fly readily in May and June. They are attracted to night-lights, and may enter through an open window or door. Some may be brought in accidentally on cut flowers or in furniture that has been in storage or sent out for repair.

Carpet beetles are among the most difficult indoor pests to control because of their ability to find food in obscure places and to disperse widely throughout a building. The best way to attack a carpet beetle problem is prevention. Vacuum regularly, do not store soiled fabrics (that is fabric that has been exposed to food spills), and use moth crystals or flakes when storing wool or other potential food of carpet beetles. Cedar-lined closets and chests help but are not 100 percent effective. Any tight box or bag that can be sealed is a good storage container.

When an infestation has become established, it is necessary to locate, as best possible, the source of the infestation in the house. Check all potential substrates inside the house, and remove or treat any that show signs of damage. Treat affected items by sprinkling them with moth crystals, and then placing the items in tightly sealed containers for 2-3 weeks. Rugs should be rolled tightly and completely sealed in plastic, or taken to a professional cleaner. Discard infested food items.



Adult (left) and larva (right) of the varied carpet beetle (left pair) and the black carpet beetle (right pair)