

Clothes Moths

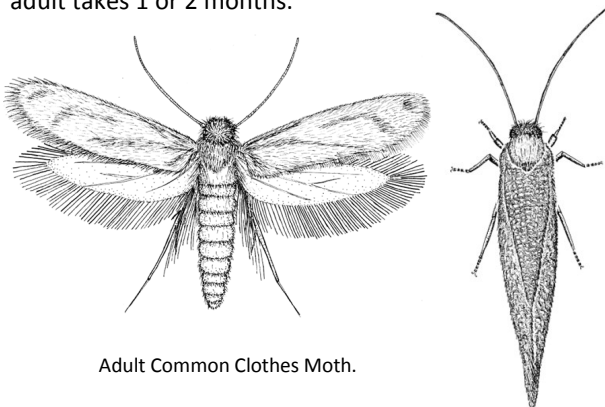
There are several species of clothes moth in the U.S. The two mostly commonly encountered species are the common clothes Moth, *Tineola bisellieta*, and the case-bearing clothes Moth, *Tinea pellionella*. A third species, a case-bearing moth has appeared in recent years in the southern parts of the country, but it does not cause the damage that the other two do. Common and case-Bearing clothes moths are found throughout temperate regions of the world.

The natural food of clothes moths is pollen, hair, feathers, wool, fur, dead insects and dried animal remains. They will feed on any fabric made with wool including clothing and carpets. The term "moth-eaten" refers to the damage done to fabrics, skins or furs by these insects. They have probably been a pest since man started wearing clothes.

The common clothes moth is second only to the carpet beetle in the amount of damage it causes in homes in California. East of the Rocky Mountains the Clothes Moth does most of the damage seen in homes.

Clothes moth adults are small (1/4 inch from wing tip to wing tip), yellowish white or buff-colored moths, with a satiny sheen to the wings. They are weak fliers, and prefer to fly in darkness, although they can be seen flying in dark corners or on the edge of lighted areas.

There are two or three broods per year. At room temperature, 68°-72° F., adult moths live 2-4 weeks, longer at lower temperatures. The complete life cycle from egg to adult takes 1 or 2 months.



Adult Common Clothes Moth.

Homes can become infested by clothes moths either by infested clothing or other fabric materials being brought in, or simply by the moths flying from house to house. Lint from wool rugs, pet hair and similar materials accumulating in furniture and along and behind baseboards are common ongoing sources of infestation. Eggs are laid directly on the food source. All clothes moth damage is done by the caterpillars. The adults do not feed.

Larvae are white with a dark head and at maturity may reach 1/2 inch in length. They spin silken webbing when they feed and generally incorporate fabric or fibers into this silken feeding tube.

Clothes moth larvae feed on any protein-containing materials, particularly fibers, including wool, silk, hair or fur. They will also feed on feathers and pollen. These caterpillars will also feed on brushes using animal hairs. They are more likely to feed on soiled materials.

A number of steps must be taken to control this pest. The best control is prevention. Keep woolens clean, and stored with moth crystals in plastic bags or tightly closed containers during times of the year when they are not being worn. Dry cleaning will kill eggs, larvae and adults in the fabric. Periodically clean areas along baseboards and in cracks where hair and insect debris may accumulate, areas behind heater and vents and in closets where woolens and furs are stored. Eggs and larvae can be killed by freezing and heat. There are also pheromone traps that will trap the adults of the Common Clothes Moth. However, these do not work on Case-Bearing Clothes Moths.



Case-Bearing Clothes Moth larva and Common Clothes Moth. Right photo courtesy of University of Georgia Extension.