

## Mold Mites

Mold mites belong primarily to the genus *Tyrophagus* (family Acaridae). These mites occur worldwide in a wide variety of situations, including bird nests, mushrooms, bee nests and stored products, such as dried pet food, bird seed, and dried foods including grains, beans, fruit and mushrooms. These mites thrive in warm, humid situations. Large infestations can cause a coating of pale brownish “mite-dust” on the surfaces beneath and around the infested product. This dust consists of live and dead mites, cast skins and feces.

These mites are not predators or parasites. They are detritivores or fungivores feeding particularly on fungal spores, and the mold that grows on the surface of these products.

*Tyrophagus putrescentiae* is a relatively common pest of stored products, particularly ones with high protein and fat contents, such as seeds, nuts, cheese, and dried meats.

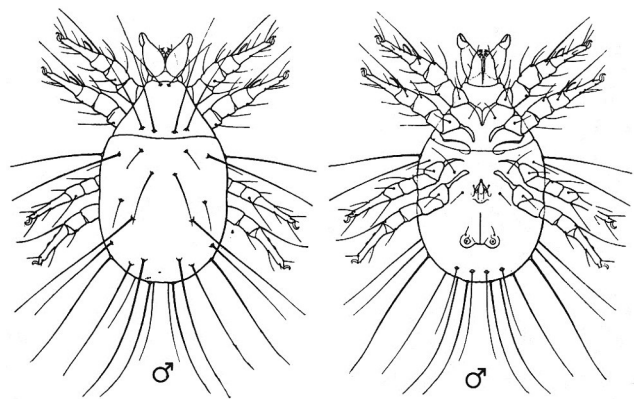
Mold mites can cause contact dermatitis and even respiratory problems in people who handle infested materials.

A number of control measures can be taken with varying success. The most important measure is to keep moisture/humidity levels as low as possible where food is stored.

1. Carefully inspect all high moisture food and grain products for evidence of mites.
2. Store pet food in a dry, clean, well-ventilated place.
3. Clean storage areas thoroughly, vacuuming and wiping down all surfaces, using hot, soapy water. Let completely dry before replacing containers.
4. Place vacuumed materials in a sealed plastic bag and dispose of immediately.
5. Food suspected of being infested or seemingly clean in an infested area can be “cleaned” by placing these materials in a freezer for a week or by heating to 54°C (120°F) for 20 minutes.



*Tyrophagus putrescentiae*, photo by Eric Erbe and Chris Pooley, USDA-SEL.



*Tyrophagus putrescentiae* (above right) male and female. Drawings from Crosskey and Lane 1993, *Medical Insects and Arachnids*. Chapman & Hall.