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## NF91-14 Moth Protection For Woolen Apparel

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## Moth Protection For Woolen Apparel

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*Rose Marie Tondl, Extension Clothing Specialist*

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Clothes moths are well-known fabric pests in the home. Carpet beetles are just as destructive and are more abundant than clothes moths in many areas.

Carpet beetle larvae do not spin webs and have a tuft of long brown hair at the end of the body. Clothing moth larvae leave behind a silken web as they feed.

When the moth is in its whitish worm-like larva stage, it eats wool and furs and does its damage. The moth also likes dimly lit areas so much damage can be done before it is even seen.

### Use Effective Preventive Measures

Practicing good housekeeping habits is an important step to protect your clothing against fabric insect damage. Use the vacuum cleaner for most of this cleaning. Dispose of the bag contents promptly; it may include eggs, larvae, or adult insects.

Purchase woolens or woolen synthetic blends that have already been treated by the manufacturer with a moth-resistant compound. Brush woolen clothing often to remove insects and their eggs.

### Proper Storage

For temporary storage, protect woolen articles by placing paradichlorobenzene crystals (known as moth crystals, flakes, or balls) in the container or closet in which the articles are stored. You need one pound of crystals or balls for each 100 cubic feet of space.

As the chemical evaporates, the vapor kills both clothes moths and carpet beetles. To hold the vapor, the container (garment bag, chest, box or trunk) must be airtight. If storing woolens in a closet without placing them into containers, see that the closet is tightly sealed.

Protection is lost if the closet door is opened frequently. Because the vapors are heavier than air, the chemicals should be placed in a shallow container on a shelf, or suspended from a clothes rod or hook in

a thin cloth bag or perforated container.

## **Cedar Closets and Chests**

Heavy and tightly constructed cedar closets and chests can be the ultimate luxury in storage. If they are thin and loosely constructed, they can smell good and still be worth no more than cardboard boxes.

The concentration of volatile oil in the heartwood of cedar kills moth larvae, but the smell does not repel them. A cedar chest or closet must have at least 3/4-inch thickness of heartwood and must close tightly to keep the oil from evaporating to be effective against moths. Cedar chips, sprays, and oils applied to cardboard or wood containers lack sufficient concentrations of the oil and lose what they do have through evaporation. Using 3/4-inch red cedar at the bottom of a chest with cedar veneer side, ends, and tops does not prevent moth eggs from developing from egg to adult.

The value of a cedar chest lies in the fact that it will kill newly hatched or young worms. It will not kill eggs, worms after they are half grown, or the adult moth. To be effective, the cedar chest must be kept tightly closed and the garments stored must be clean and free of moths.

## **Herbal Potpourris**

Although they may smell good, herbal potpourris are not an alternative to deter moths. The United States Department of Agriculture has proved that many herbs are ineffective including allspice, baking soda, camphor, cayenne pepper, eucalyptus leaves, and lavender flowers.

The herbal potpourris do have pleasant fragrances and can be useful in reducing mothball odor. Suspend them in small cloth bags in the storage containers. The scent does wear off, but can be preserved if you add some orris root or calamus powder as a fixative.

## **Commercial Mothproof Spray**

There are some spray formulations available that do a good job of protecting woolens. Those that contain synthetic pyrethroid, insecticide resmethrin or synthetic pyrethroids tetromethrin will work. Read the label for ingredients.

If you spray, do so outdoors, avoid breathing the spray and wash your hands carefully afterward. Dry items thoroughly before packing.

Products that are highly effective and do not stain or have an objectionable odor are sold under several labels. These include No Pest House & Garden, King Spray Fly & Mosquito, Real Kill, Enoz, and Fuller Brush Insecticide.

Dry cleaning is also an effective way to kill moth life.

Reference to commercial products is made with the understanding that no discrimination is intended or endorsement implied.

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