

## Cockroaches - The Unspeakable Insect

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*Long after the bomb falls and you  
and your good deeds are gone,  
cockroaches will still be here,  
prowling the streets like armored  
cars. – Tama Janowitz*

Perhaps some, in brief conversation with close friends, might mention that swarms of termites or armies of ants had invaded their homes. However, the unspeakable is to ever admit that even one cockroach has been spotted in either kitchen or den.

Of all insects known to home-dweller, the cockroach is the most despised. Most humans find the cockroach totally repulsive due to their appearance, filthy habits, and potential disease-spreading capabilities. Cockroaches feed on almost anything edible and routinely sample things that are not.

They contaminate human foodstuff with their vomit and excrement and leave strong, foul chemical odors on commodities they visit.

Cockroaches also have the potential to leave black droppings of their urine and fecal material in areas where they live, on counter tops, and inside drawers found in kitchens and bathrooms.

Most home inhabiting cockroaches are active at night and if seen during the daylight hours, it is guaranteed



that one has a major cockroach infestation. These particular insects are very sensitive to light and air movements and can detect when a person enters the room or turns on the light. The cockroach will either remain motionless or move very quickly to escape danger if found in open areas.

On Guam, there are two major cockroach species that are frequently found inhabiting the inside of our homes. The larger of the two has the common name “American” cockroach and the smaller sized one, the “German” cockroach.

The American cockroach is a notorious flier when trying to escape capture. Some people have nicknamed them the “B-52 Bomber.” As an adult, this cockroach is 1 ½ inches long with fully developed reddish/brown wings. The American cockroach is a common inhabitant of sewage systems and can enter the home through pipes leading to and from sewers or septic systems. Cockroach eggs are not produced singly but are produced in egg cases with other eggs. The American cockroach likes to glue its egg cases onto wooden surfaces underneath counters and drawers. The egg cases are brown when laid and turn black in a few days.

The adult German cockroach is about ½ inch in length, brown in color, with two dark longitudinal streaks on what

looks like the top of its head. The German cockroach is most prevalent in and around homes, supermarkets, and restaurants. During the day, they hide in cracks and crevices, under kitchen appliances, sinks, cabinets, behind baseboards and moldings, in walls, and in food pantries. Many homes become infested with German cockroaches when they are introduced in infested carton material such as brown paper bags, cardboard materials, and foodstuffs. This cockroach produces more eggs per egg case than any other pest cockroach. Unlike the American cockroach, the German cockroach carries its egg case, visually protruding from its body, until the eggs are ready to hatch.

It is a lot easier to try to prevent cockroach infestation in the home than to control their numbers once they get established. The old saying, “cleanliness is close to godliness” is in fact the best way to keep cockroaches out of the home. Sanitation and proper food storage is the easiest and most obvious means of control. If one owns house pets, it is best not to allow uneaten pet food, canned or dry, to remain out on the floor. It is important to clean under all small appliances such as microwaves, coffee makers, toaster ovens, and especially store garbage in well-sealed containers.

Boric acid is an old remedy and still quite effective in the chemical control of cockroaches. It is slow acting, compared to chemical sprays, but is relatively nontoxic. Place boric acid into cracks and crevices, behind walls, under stoves, dishwashers, refrigerators, and in areas where cockroaches are likely to be found at night.

There are many insect foggers that are very effective against cockroaches. However, the use of insect foggers require all home inhabitants, humans and pets, to stay out of the house while it is being applied. If foggers are used in the kitchen, all food products must be tightly sealed and put away before a fogger can be used. After use, all countertops need to be wiped clean before allowing dishes or food products to be placed out.

Besides the use of boric acid and insect foggers, the homeowner has another very important tool to use against these insects – cockroach bait stations. These are very safe to use and provide a quicker kill than boric acid and are safer and easier to use than foggers.

Cockroaches are attracted to the bait, feed on the poison, and die within two to four days. Place bait stations under and around sinks, stoves and refrigerators, in cup-boards and drawers, near garbage cans, behind toilets, and under hot water tanks. It is important to use no less than the recommended number of bait stations on the product label to ensure optimum control. In heavy infestations, use as many as you can afford. Bait stations need to be replaced every three to four months. Their biggest disadvantage is their price.

For more information about cockroaches or other household pests, you can contact your local Cooperative Extension Service on Guam or throughout Micronesia.

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