North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service

In-Site For Managing Work & Family

Rid Your Home of Mildew

Have you noticed a musty odor in your home? Do you see black, gray, white or even pink splotches on your walls, furniture, bathroom tile or even on your clothes?

Mildew can grow anywhere there is moisture, dirt and heat. It especially likes warm, dark areas, such as bathrooms, closets, basements and crawl spaces. You can find mildew on draperies, bed linens, clothes, shoes, books, furniture and the exterior siding of your home. It actually can rot fabrics and discolor walls and wood surfaces if it is allowed to continue to grow.

Ways to Prevent Mildew

The best way to prevent mildew is to keep your home, furnishings and fabrics dry and clean. Also, you need to provide good ventilation in and around the home. Here is a list of some ways to control mildew growth. Check off those which you are now doing.

____ Air conditioner is used when relative humidity is above 60 percent.

Sheets of polyethylene have been installed over 80 percent of the crawl space.

____ Foundation vents are kept open to provide cross ventilation.

____ Attic is vented. (Attic fans help.)

____ Ventilating fans, vented to the outside, are used in the kitchen and bathroom.

____ Gas heaters are vented to the outside using an approved flue.

____ Clothes dryers are vented to the outside of the house. Damp clothes and lines are hung to dry, not left around damp or wet.

____ House and clothes are kept clean. (Remember: mildew begins on dirt.)

____ Wet shower curtains are stretched out after *every* shower.

____ Moisture-absorbing materials are used during times of high humidity. Some examples are silica gel, activated charcoal, calcium chloride, moth ball crystals and kitty litter.

____ A low-wattage light bulb is kept on in closets to dry out the area.

____ Heating system is turned on when the humidity is very high.

____ Leather goods are waxed.

____ Shrubs that grow close to the foundation are trimmed so that there is 1 foot of air space around the house.

____ Mildew is cleaned from any exterior area of the house before repainting.

How to Get Rid of Mildew

In many cases, a simple mixture of 1 gallon water and 1 cup liquid chlorine bleach is an effective mildew remover. In other cases, you may want to use detergent, ammonia, white vinegar, washing soda or some combination of these ingredients.

CAUTION: *Never mix liquid chlorine bleach and ammonia. This can produce a toxic fume.*

Here are some solutions to common mildew problems:

Interior Wood Surfaces. Make a solution of 8 to 10 tablespoons of washing soda and 1 gallon water. Scrub the mildewed surface

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using a soft-bristled brush. Then rinse with clear water and dry. This solution can be used on most painted or stained wood surfaces. If the mildew has grown under the paint or varnish, extra steps will be needed. Call the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service center in your county for help.

Ceramic Tile. Wash with a solution of 1/2 cup ammonia, 1/2 cup white vinegar, 1/4 cup washing soda and 1 gallon warm water. Rinse thoroughly. For heavy mildew stains, make a paste of baking soda and liquid chlorine bleach, then scrub with a small toothbrush. If the grout is badly stained, apply pure bleach with a cotton-tipped swab. Allow the bleach to remain on the tile for 30 minutes, then rinse and dry.

Washable Apparel. First, take the clothing outdoors and brush off the mildew. Then apply a detergent to the stain and launder. If the stain remains and the fabric may be bleached in chlorine bleach, soak it in a solution of 1/4 cup liquid chlorine bleach and 3/4 cup water. Rinse and then launder. Instead of bleach, you can use salt and lemon juice and let the fabric dry in direct sunlight.

Exterior Wood Siding. Prepare a solution of 3 quarts warm water, 1 quart chlorine bleach, 1 ounce detergent and 3 ounces trisodium phosphate (TSP). Use a long-handled brush to scrub the surface, and then rinse with a garden hose. The solution also can be applied with a garden sprayer.

There are a number of excellent commercial mildew removal products on the market. Many of these products come with a spray nozzle, which makes them easy to apply. The do cost more than homemade mildew removers.

If you use a commercial mildew remover, follow the directions on the container. Whether you use a commercial or a homemade mildew remover, make sure you have plenty of ventilation. Raise a window or use an exhaust fan. And protect your hands with rubber gloves.

Summary

Mildew is unsightly and can produce a musty odor. Mildew grows in warm, dark, damp places. To remove mildew, try a simple homemade cleaning solution. Commercial mildew removal products also are very effective. To prevent mildew growth, keep surfaces clean, eliminate moisture and ventilate well.

Prepared by
Dr. Glenda M. Herman
Extension Housing Specialist

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