

# German Cockroach

Location: Calgary, AB  
Date: Aug. 2, 2004



**Common Name:** German Cockroach

**Latin Name:** *Blatta germanica*, Linnaeus, 1767  
(R. Bercha, det.)

**Length:** 15 mm

**Range:** Throughout Alberta

**Habitat:** Various (indoors and outdoors)

**Time of year seen:** Year round - indoors

**Diet:** Various

## Cockroaches

Until recently Cockroaches have not been common in Lethbridge but pest control experts tell us that this pest is moving into Southern Alberta in greater numbers.

The cockroach has been around for about 350 million years! It is known to be a highly adaptable insect, able to withstand radiation in excess of what man can tolerate, and requires very little food to survive. In fact, several roaches may subsist on a thin layer of grease for months! They have been able to survive because of their rapid reproductive cycles and adaptability to poisons, environments, and even nuclear bombs.

A recent survey indicated that the cockroach was the most despised creature, beating out snakes, rats, bats, and spiders.

The cockroach is considered to be a pest because it invades where we live, eat and sleep. There are between 4,000 to 7,500 different species of roaches. Of this amount, only one percent are considered to be a pest. The German Cockroach is the most common species in the area but other species may be found.

You can bring cockroaches into your home in second hand furniture, cardboard, used clothing or other items that provide a dark place for cockroaches to hide.

Studies have shown that 98% of cockroaches carry bacteria that are known to cause food poisoning. They pick up unsanitary material with their legs and bodies, and may contaminate food, counters and utensils. Roaches may also regurgitate material that was previously eaten which may contain potentially hazardous bacteria. Diseases that cockroaches may spread include: Typhoid Fever, Dysentery, Cholera, Poliomyelitis Virus, and Tapeworm.

Cockroaches mouth parts are used for chewing, not biting. Most roaches are nocturnal, that is, they prefer the night and are sensitive to all forms of light except for the red spectrum. They are most active right after dusk and right before dawn. This may be a response to a genetic defense because light may indicate the presence of humans, their most dangerous predator. They prefer to live in warm, moist places and are more abundant in tropical areas. However, they can live in almost any environment and they have been found in the North and South Poles.

Although cockroaches live in proximity to each other in crevices or other hiding places, they are not social insects such as the bee, termite, or the ant. They can develop immunity that extends to poisons, and they are known to survive decapitation. This is possible because they have two nerve centers-one in the head, the other in the tail. The only way it would eventually die would be from dehydration. They can do without food for over one month, but they need water at least once a week. They will feed on all foods, grease, paint, wallpaper paste, and even bookbinding.

Cockroaches prefer starchy food, but will eat anything organic, including wood, shoes, paper, glue, soap, even eyelashes. This, of course, intensifies the need for proper sanitation, especially in food establishments.

The female will have up to forty babies at one time. Some species will mate only once and they will remain pregnant for the rest of their lives. Adults will live for an average of eight to fifteen months. Cockroaches reproduce on an average of four times per year. Females have a broader abdomen and are more rounded than the male. This constant reproduction adds to their ability to become immune to environment changes or pesticides. The life cycle of the cockroach is from egg-nymph-adult. This cycle is called simple metamorphosis. It means that the younger nymphs look very similar to the adult and will only differ in size.

## **Tips to help Prevent Cockroach Infestations**

The following tips will help prevent cockroach infestations in your home:

Good sanitation and removing clutter is the best cockroach control. Thorough and frequent cleaning, and organizing are essential.

- Clean up spills immediately, especially in dark or dimly lit areas. All waste food scraps and particles should be disposed of promptly; don't allow scraps or crumbs to accumulate anywhere. Make sure dirty dishes don't sit overnight.
- Store foods and other items off the floor and keep all packages and containers tightly wrapped and covered.
- Carefully inspect all boxes, crates and bags that are brought into the home.
- Eliminate clutter and an accumulation of empty boxes, containers, and boards. Separate items stored in drawers, cabinets and storage areas. Rotating goods often will eliminate harborage and discourage breeding.
- Keep basements and storage areas dry, clean, ventilated and well-lit. Remove any standing water, repair leaking pipes, and keep floor drains clean and free-flowing. Use dehumidifiers to remove moisture. Prevent an accumulation of liquids on any surfaces.
- Keep laundry storage areas clean to prevent cross infestation.
- Check plants and plantings for harborage and infestation. Remove all logs, or tree stumps used for decoration.

Once a cockroach infestation occurs, it generally requires the use of a pesticide. The expertise and effectiveness of a qualified Pest Control Operator is advised.

**Call Lethbridge Housing immediately if you see any of these pests, or if you notice any other unusual insects in your home.**