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# Clover mites:

## characteristics and control

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no. 5.505

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### Quick Facts

- Clover mites are commonly found in homes during spring and fall; they enter homes during fall to overwinter and leave in late winter to feed on plants.
- Clover mites in homes are reddish or brown and are frequently described as "walking dust specks."
- Clover mites in homes do not feed on plants, damage household contents, or bite and harm humans.
- Most effective controls involve barrier treatments around foundations to prevent movement of clover mites into homes during the fall or early spring. Clover mites can injure turfgrass during early-mid spring.
- Turf injury by clover mites is typically concentrated along the south and west sides of houses, trees and shrubs, or on south-facing hills.

### Clover Mites in Homes

Clover mites are most frequently found as nuisance pests in homes. During warm days in fall and spring, large numbers of clover mites may become active around windows with a southern exposure. Infestations may then spread to walls, curtains, furniture and carpeting. Typically, clover mites are described as "walking dust specks." When crushed, clover mites leave rusty red stains that are very noticeable on white surfaces.

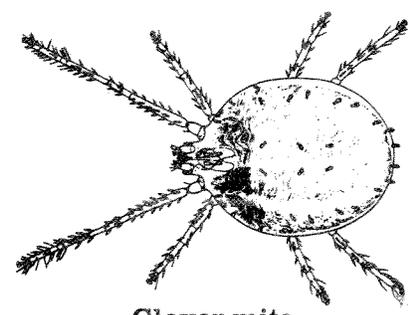
Clover mites do not bite people, transmit diseases or feed on household furnishings or pantry supplies. However, clover mites can be a considerable nuisance. Homes constructed out of brick or stone and homes in subdivisions less than 10 years old tend to have the most problems with clover mites.

Problems typically begin in late fall when mites gather on plants around the building. They then enter homes through cracks in door and window frames when cold weather arrives. Clover mites generally are inactive during winter months, but a warm period in the winter may bring them out of hiding.

After leaving these overwintering areas in February and March, clover mites move to lawns to feed. One and possibly two generations are completed on lawns before the clover mites again move into homes and other protected areas for shelter prior to warm summer temperatures.

Clover mites are a common species of mite that breed outdoors on turfgrass, clover and other plants during spring and fall. During October and November, clover mites seek protected areas to overwinter and may move into homes in large numbers. Movements of clover mites into homes also occur in April and May and they are a common nuisance problem at this time.

Clover mites are smaller than the head of a pin and range in color from reddish or brown to dark green. Under close examination they can be observed to have an unusually long pair of front legs, which separates them from the common spider mites.



Clover mite

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Clover mites survive the summer as dormant eggs.

Effective control of clover mites involves activities designed to prevent mites from moving into the home in the fall or spring. Clover mite problems often can be permanently prevented if all grass next to foundations is removed leaving a strip of bare soil at least 18 inches wide. The strip can be covered with pea gravel or planted with annual or perennial flowers, such as zinnias, marigolds, chrysanthemums, roses or salvia that are not attractive to clover mites.

Another method to reduce or prevent infestations inside the home is to spray a chemical barrier strip on the outside, spraying 5 to 10 feet out from the base of the foundation and a few feet on the walls. This treatment needs only to be made along south and southwest sides of the house, where problems with clover mites moving into homes are concentrated.

Barrier treatments can involve the use of products that contain one of the following ingredients:  
chlorpyrifos (Dursban)  
Diazinon  
dicofol (Kelthane)  
propoxur (Baygon)  
malathion

Always read and follow label directions for mixing and use.

Existing clover mite infestations in a home are best handled by vacuuming them when they appear abundant. The vacuum cleaner bags should be disposed of after such a use to prevent reinfestations. Clover mites also can be spot treated and killed by most household "spray and wash" cleaners or by insecticide aerosols containing pyrethrins. However, both indoor chemical controls and crushed clover mites can stain certain house-

hold surfaces. Spot applications of residual insecticides such as propoxur (Baygon), diazinon, chlorpyrifos (Dursban) or malathion also can be made to cracks and crevices along baseboards, around windows and doors, and between windows and screens. Left alone, clover mite problems during spring will end on their own by the end of May.

### **Clover Mites as Turf Pests**

After clover mites move from their protected overwintering sites (including homes) they feed on grasses and other vegetation. Feeding is concentrated on plants in sunny exposures (south and west) adjacent to buildings, trees or shrubs. Heavily infested turfgrass appears silvery and can be killed by clover mites at this time of the year. Clover mite injury to turf is commonly mistaken for "winter kill."

Clover mites produce two or more generations while outdoors feeding on grasses and other plants. However, turfgrass injury only occurs very early in the growing season, from February to May. Later in the season, vigorously growing lawns are little affected by the clover mites and the mite populations decrease as dormant eggs are laid.

Spot spray treatments for clover mite control may be required on turfgrass during spring to prevent clover mite injury. Products containing chlorpyrifos (Dursban), Diazinon or dicofol (Kelthane) are registered for this purpose. Malathion and insecticidal soaps also are effective for control of clover mites on lawns. Applications of insecticides should be made when clover mites are detected on the lawns by carefully examining the grass. Treated areas should be limited to the sunny spots next to homes or woody plants where injury is concentrated.