

# How to Get Rid of Silverfish Naturally

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If you have ever flipped on a bathroom light in the middle of the night only to see a silvery, teardrop-shaped insect darting across the floor, you are not alone. Silverfish are a common nuisance in Florida, thriving in our state's naturally humid and warm climate. While these fast-moving, nocturnal pests do not bite or spread disease to humans, they can wreak absolute havoc on your personal belongings. From cherished family photographs and important documents to your favorite clothing and even the wallpaper in your home, silverfish are destructive eaters that can cause significant damage if left unchecked. Fortunately, you do not always have to resort to harsh chemicals to reclaim your space. With a combination of environmental adjustments and natural remedies, you can effectively send these unwanted guests packing.

## Identifying the Silverfish Threat

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Before you can effectively treat a pest problem, you must know exactly what you are dealing with. Silverfish are incredibly distinct insects, easily recognized by their unique appearance and behavior. They are typically about three-quarters of an inch long, with a flat, teardrop-shaped body that tapers at the end. Their bodies are covered in silvery-gray scales that give them a metallic sheen, which, combined with their wriggling, fish-like movements, earns them their common name. They have two long antennae on their heads and three tail-like appendages at their rear.

These insects are strictly nocturnal, preferring to stay hidden in dark, damp areas during the day. This is why you most often spot them when you turn on a light in a dark room or open a rarely used closet or cabinet. They are incredibly fast runners, making them difficult to catch or squash. If you see one silverfish, there is a strong likelihood that many more are hiding nearby, as they reproduce quickly and can live for several years under the right conditions.

## What Silverfish Eat and the Damage They Cause

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The primary reason silverfish are considered such a severe household pest is their diet. They feed on carbohydrates, specifically starches and sugars. Unfortunately for homeowners, these substances are abundant in everyday household items. Silverfish will happily feast on paper products, making books, magazines, important documents, and cardboard storage boxes prime targets. They are also drawn to the glue in book bindings and the paste used behind wallpaper, which can lead to peeling walls and ruined literature.

Beyond paper, silverfish are notorious for damaging textiles. They will eat through clothing, particularly items made of cotton, linen, or silk. If you have ever pulled a stored garment out of the closet only to find it peppered with irregular holes, silverfish may be the culprits. They are also known to consume synthetic fibers, dead skin cells, and even dandruff. In the kitchen, they can contaminate unsealed dry goods like cereal, flour, and rolled oats. Perhaps most heartbreaking is their appetite for the glossy coating on photographs, meaning a silverfish infestation can permanently destroy irreplaceable family memories.

## Why Florida Homes Are a Silverfish Paradise

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To understand why silverfish are so prevalent in Florida, you only need to look at the local climate. Silverfish require high humidity to survive and thrive, typically preferring environments with relative humidity levels between 75 and 95 percent. Florida's subtropical climate, characterized by warm temperatures year-round and frequent, heavy rainfall, creates the perfect external environment for these pests.

When this naturally humid outdoor air makes its way indoors, or when indoor moisture levels rise due to everyday activities like showering and cooking, it creates a silverfish paradise inside your home. They are naturally drawn to the dampest areas of a house, which is why they are most frequently found in bathrooms, laundry rooms, kitchens, attics, and basements. The constant warmth of Florida means that silverfish do not experience a winter die-off, allowing populations to grow steadily throughout the entire year if not actively managed.

# Reducing Indoor Humidity: The First Line of Defense

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Because silverfish absolutely depend on moisture to survive, the most effective long-term strategy for eliminating them is to control the humidity levels within your home. If you remove their preferred environment, they will not be able to thrive or reproduce.

Investing in a high-quality dehumidifier is one of the most impactful steps you can take. Place dehumidifiers in naturally damp areas like basements, crawl spaces, and laundry rooms to keep the relative humidity below 50 percent. In bathrooms, always use the exhaust fan during and after showers to pull moisture-laden air out of the room. If your bathroom does not have a fan, crack a window to allow steam to escape.

It is also crucial to address any sources of excess water in your home. Inspect your plumbing regularly and promptly fix any leaking faucets, pipes, or toilets. Even a small, slow drip can create enough moisture to sustain a silverfish population. Additionally, ensure your air conditioning system is properly maintained. A well-functioning AC unit not only cools the air but also acts as a whole-house dehumidifier, pulling moisture out of the indoor environment. Regularly check and clear the AC drain lines to prevent water from backing up and pooling, which can attract silverfish and other pests.

## Natural Remedies to Repel and Eliminate Silverfish

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If you are dealing with an active silverfish presence, reducing humidity is essential, but you may also need to take direct action to eliminate the existing insects. Fortunately, several natural, non-toxic remedies can effectively combat silverfish without introducing harsh chemicals into your living space.

### Diatomaceous Earth

Diatomaceous earth (DE) is a highly effective, natural powder made from the fossilized remains of tiny aquatic organisms called diatoms. At a microscopic level, the particles of DE are incredibly sharp. When a silverfish crawls across the powder, it cuts through their protective waxy outer coating, causing them to rapidly dehydrate and die. To use DE safely and effectively, make sure you purchase food-grade diatomaceous earth, which is safe to use around humans and pets. Lightly dust the powder in areas where you have seen silverfish activity, such as along baseboards, behind appliances, in the

backs of cabinets, and in dark corners of closets. Leave the powder in place for several days before vacuuming it up and reapplying as necessary.

## **Boric Acid Powder**

Boric acid is another naturally occurring compound that is deadly to silverfish. It works similarly to diatomaceous earth by damaging their exoskeleton and dehydrating them, but it also acts as a stomach poison if they ingest it while grooming themselves. You can apply boric acid powder in a thin layer along the perimeters of rooms, under sinks, and in other hiding spots. While boric acid is natural, it can be toxic to pets and children if ingested in large quantities, so it should be used with caution and applied only in areas that are inaccessible to curious hands and paws.

## **Cedar Shavings and Essential Oils**

Silverfish are strongly repelled by the scent of cedar. You can use this to your advantage by placing cedar shavings, cedar blocks, or cedar sachets in areas where you want to deter them. Closets, dressers, and storage bins are excellent places to use cedar. You can also use cedar essential oil by mixing a few drops with water in a spray bottle and misting the solution along baseboards and inside cabinets. Other essential oils, such as peppermint, citrus, and tea tree oil, also have strong repellent properties and can be used in the same manner.

## **Lavender Sachets and Cinnamon**

The pleasant scent of lavender is incredibly offensive to silverfish. Placing small sachets of dried lavender in your drawers, closets, and storage boxes can help keep these pests away from your clothing and linens. Similarly, the strong aroma of cinnamon acts as a natural deterrent. You can place whole cinnamon sticks or small dishes of ground cinnamon in kitchen cabinets and pantries to protect your dry goods from silverfish infiltration.

## **Creating DIY Silverfish Traps**

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In addition to using repellents and desiccating powders, you can actively reduce the silverfish population in your home by creating simple, natural traps. These traps capitalize on the insects' natural behaviors and dietary preferences.

## The Glass Jar Trap

A glass jar trap is an easy and effective way to catch silverfish. Take a clean, empty glass jar, such as a mason jar or an old jelly jar, and wrap the outside with masking tape or athletic tape. This provides a textured surface for the silverfish to climb up. Inside the jar, place a small piece of bread, a few oats, or a pinch of flour to act as bait. Place the jar in an area where you have seen silverfish. The insects will climb the tape to reach the food, but once they fall inside, the smooth glass interior will prevent them from climbing back out. Check the jar every few days, dispose of any captured insects, and refresh the bait.

## The Newspaper Trap

Because silverfish love dark, damp environments and feed on paper, a wet newspaper trap is highly appealing to them. Roll up a section of newspaper and secure the ends with rubber bands. Moisten the newspaper slightly with water so that it is damp but not soaking wet. Leave the rolled newspaper out overnight in an area with silverfish activity. The insects will crawl inside the damp paper to hide and feed. In the morning, without unrolling the paper, carefully pick it up and throw it away in an outside trash can, or burn it if you have a safe place to do so. Repeat this process for several nights until you no longer catch any silverfish.

## Proper Storage Techniques to Protect Your Belongings

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Preventing silverfish damage requires changing how you store your vulnerable items. Cardboard boxes are a silverfish's dream—they provide a dark hiding place, and the cardboard itself is a food source. If you have items stored in cardboard boxes in your attic, garage, or closets, you are practically inviting an infestation.

Instead, transfer your stored items into heavy-duty, sealed plastic containers with tight-fitting lids. Plastic is impervious to silverfish, and a tight seal will keep them from finding their way inside. This is especially important for storing out-of-season clothing, important documents, and photographs. When storing books, avoid packing them tightly against the back of a shelf, as this creates a dark, undisturbed environment. Leave a small gap behind the books to allow for air circulation and light penetration, which makes the area less appealing to silverfish.

## Decluttering and Sealing Entry Points

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Silverfish thrive in cluttered environments because clutter provides endless hiding spots. Stacks of old magazines, piles of mail, and unorganized closets give these pests exactly what they need to remain undisturbed. Taking the time to declutter your home, particularly in naturally damp areas like basements and garages, will significantly reduce the available habitat for silverfish. Dispose of unneeded paper products and keep the items you do need neatly organized and properly stored.

Furthermore, you must stop silverfish from entering your home in the first place. Inspect the exterior of your house for any cracks or gaps in the foundation, around windows and doors, and where utility pipes enter the building. Use a high-quality silicone caulk to seal these entry points. Ensure that your windows and doors have tight-fitting weatherstripping and that any screens are free of tears. By sealing up your home's exterior, you can prevent silverfish from seeking refuge indoors when the Florida weather becomes too extreme.

## When to Call a Professional

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While natural remedies and environmental modifications can be highly effective against minor silverfish problems, they are not always sufficient for severe or deeply entrenched infestations. Because silverfish reproduce quickly and can hide deep within the structure of your home—inside wall voids, under flooring, and deep within insulation—a large population can be incredibly difficult to eradicate on your own.

If you have diligently applied natural treatments, reduced your home's humidity, and improved your storage practices, but you are still seeing silverfish regularly, it is time to call in the experts. Professional pest control technicians have the experience to locate the hidden nests and the specialized tools to treat areas that are inaccessible to homeowners. They can implement a comprehensive, integrated pest management strategy that will eliminate the current infestation and prevent future outbreaks.

If you're in Palm Beach, Broward, Martin, or St. Lucie County and need expert help, O'Hara Pest Control has been helping Florida homeowners since 1973. Call 561-655-9011 or visit [oharapestcontrol.com](http://oharapestcontrol.com).