

Q & A

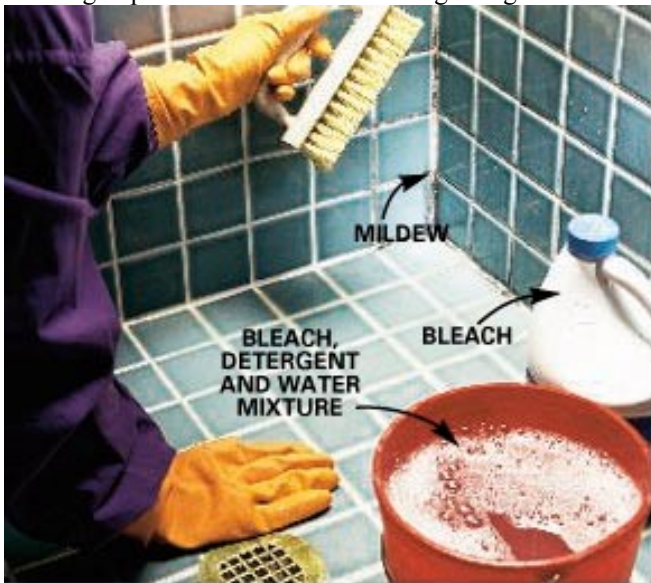
Removing Mold?

We have mold growing in our house. Can we remove it ourselves or should we call in the professionals?

Almost every home gets mold infestations. The trick is to stop them before they get big and harm both you and your home. In this article, we'll show you how to identify mold and eliminate the small infestations that have gotten out of hand. We recommend any infestation on the inside of your house larger than a ten foot by ten foot area be removed by a professional. You can normally do a crawl space by yourself.

Before you attempt to remove the mold, be sure the source of the mold has been eliminated.

You can easily remove minor mold with ordinary household cleaning products. But disturbing big infestations



can be bad for your health, particularly if you are an allergy sufferer or have a weakened immune system. When you discover an extensive mold problem, we recommend that you consider calling in a professional to handle the problem. Look under "Industrial Hygiene Consultants" or "Environmental and Ecological Consultants" in your Yellow Pages. Or call your local public health department.

HOW TO IDENTIFY MOLD

You can easily spot the most visible type of mold, called mildew, which begins as tiny, usually black spots but often grows into larger colonies. It's the black stuff you see in the grout lines in your shower, on damp walls, and outdoors on

the surfaces of deck boards and painted siding, especially in damp and shady areas. A mildewed surface is often difficult to distinguish from a dirty one. To test for mildew, simply dab a few drops of household bleach on the blackened area. If it lightens after one to two minutes, you have mildew. If the area remains dark, you probably have dirt.

Mildew is a surface type of mold that won't damage your home's structure. But other types of mold cause rot. Probe the suspect area with a screwdriver or other sharp tool. If the wood is soft or crumbles, the fungi have taken hold and rot has begun.

If you have a high concentration of mold, you may smell it. If you detect the typical musty odor, check for mold on damp carpets, damp walls, damp crawl spaces and wet wood under your floors, wet roof sheathing and other damp areas. Clean up these infestations right away before they get worse.

REMOVING INFESTATIONS REQUIRES PRECAUTIONS

Surface molds grow in just about any damp location, such as the grout lines of a ceramic tiled shower. They're easy to scrub away with a mixture of 1/2 cup bleach, 1 qt. water and a little detergent. The bleach in the cleaning mixture kills the mold, and the detergent helps lift it off the surface so you can rinse it away so it won't return as fast. You can also buy a mildew cleaner at hardware stores, paint stores and most home centers.

CAUTION: Don't mix ammonia or any detergent containing ammonia with bleach. The combination forms a poisonous gas.

Even for simple cleaning, protect yourself from contact with mold and the bleach solution by wearing a long-sleeve shirt and long pants as well as plastic or rubber gloves and goggles. Tip: Special gloves made of nitrile are as tough as latex but thinner and more protective.

If the mold doesn't disappear after light scrubbing, reapply the cleaning mix and let it sit for a minute or two. Then lightly scrub again.

Seal the clean surfaces when they're thoroughly dry to slow future moisture penetration. Apply a grout sealer (\$5 to \$25 per quart from tile shops and home centers) to tile joints.

You can scrub away the surface mold common to bathrooms, decks and siding in a matter of minutes with a 1-to-8 bleach and water solution. But often mold grows and spreads in places you don't notice, until you spot surface staining, feel mushy drywall or detect that musty smell. If you have to remove mold concentrations covering more than a few square feet, where the musty odor is strong or where you find extensive water damage, we recommend that you take special precautions. You want to not only avoid contaminating the rest of the house but also protect yourself from

