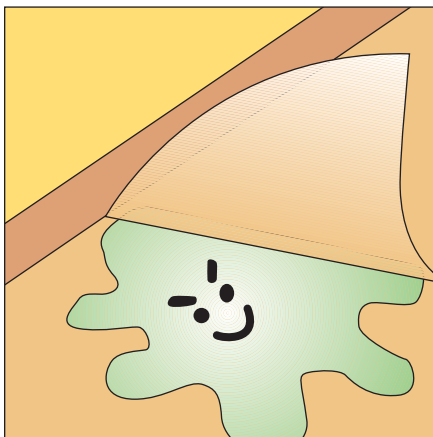




## HOUSING & ENVIRONMENT

JORGE H. ATILES, Ph.D.  
EXTENSION HOUSING SPECIALIST, RETIRED

Reviewed by PAMELA R. TURNER, Ph.D.  
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR &  
EXTENSION HOUSING SPECIALIST



## MOLD: THE UNINVITED GUEST

# REMOVING MOLD IN YOUR HOME

Excess moisture, poor ventilation or poor cleaning habits can promote mold growth in your home. Typically, mold does little to hide its presence, so it can generally be detected easily. If you suspect that mold has invaded your home, it is important to locate and eliminate the source of moisture, address the problems that provide the right conditions for mold growth and then clean it.

### Has Mold Invaded Your Home?

Although mold originates from microscopic spores, mold itself is usually easy to detect. While testing is sometimes used to determine the presence of mold, generally a quick investigation with your eyes and nose can tell you if mold is present. Some signs of mold include:

- Visible mold growth. Mold can appear in a variety of textures and colors; it often appears as a discoloration, stain, or fuzzy growth.
- Musty or earthy odors.
- Water damage and discoloration around the area of the damage.

Keep in mind that the first signs of mold might be allergy-like symptoms in members of your household. If you detect excess moisture or a musty odor but do not see mold, be sure to check behind cabinets and under carpeting, common hiding places for mold.

### The Six Steps of Mold Removal

If you have found that mold is growing in your home, keep in mind that it will not want to leave. Taking the following steps will help in its removal.

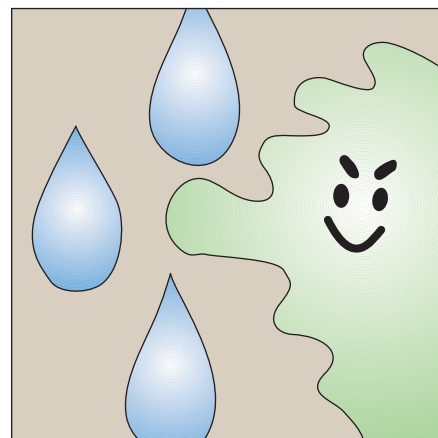
**1. Fixing the Moisture Problem:** Mold cannot grow without moisture. Listed below are some common causes of household moisture problems:

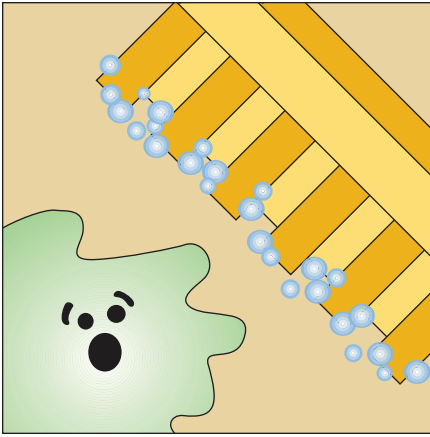
- Roof and plumbing leaks.
- Overflow from tubs, toilets, or sinks.
- Excessive use of a humidifier.
- Inadequate venting in the kitchen or bathroom.
- Poor venting of household appliances (clothes dryers, stoves, etc., should be vented to the outside when possible).

Besides fixing such maintenance problems as leaky pipes, your best defense against mold growth is to control the humidity level within your home. Keeping your humidity level at 30-50 percent in the winter and less than 60 percent in the summer will help combat moisture problems. Adequately-

sized heating and cooling ventilation systems, better air circulation, and the use of a dehumidifier can all help lower your home's humidity.

**2. Drying of Wet Materials:** Especially when overflow or flooding has occurred, drying of wet materials should begin immediately to stop mold growth. Fans and dehumidifiers can help in this process. You may need to discard the items if you cannot dry them well within 48 hours.\*





Non-porous materials can usually be cleaned of mold using detergent and water.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION:**  
Contact your county  
Extension office or visit  
[extension.uga.edu](http://extension.uga.edu)

**3. Treatment or Disposal of Contaminated Materials:** Before beginning mold treatment and clean up, you should consider using protective equipment. This equipment includes rubber gloves, eye goggles (preferably without vents), outer clothing that can be easily removed and/or discarded, and a filter dust mask. Some items that have been affected by mold can be saved, some cannot. Here is a list of items and possible treatments:

**Clothes:** Mild mildew spots can often be treated by brushing off surface growth outside and then allowing the items to sun and air dry. For washable items, soap and water followed by sun and air-drying can be effective. Persistent mold may call for a stronger solution; severely damaged items should be thrown away.

**Porous Materials (Carpet, Wood Products, Ceiling Tiles, etc.):** These items should typically be discarded, especially if mold is severe. Carpets can sometimes be saved with simple methods, such as sponging with dry soap or detergent suds and then wiping clean, or using a shampoo machine. Professional services may be necessary. For solid wood see section 4 below.

**Paper and Books:** Although there is often no hope for these items, minor damage can often be rectified by brushing off surface mold and sprinkling with cornstarch or talcum powder to eliminate dampness.

Discarded items should be enclosed in plastic bags or wrapped in plastic sheets to prevent more contamination.

**4. Cleaning of Surfaces:** Non-porous materials such as hard plastic, concrete, glass, metal, and solid wood can usually be cleaned of mold. Scrub mold off with detergent and water and then dry completely.

**5. Disinfecting Surfaces:** After cleaning hard surfaces, you may choose to disinfect them. Mixing 1/4 to 1/2 cup of bleach per gallon of water provides a disinfectant solution. Allow the solution to dry on the surface of the treated areas rather than wiping up. Open windows while doing this to prevent inhaling fumes. Also, remember to never mix bleach and ammonia—they can produce toxic gas.

**6. Closing the Door on Mold:** Mold will take any opportunity to grow in your home. Stay alert for moisture problems, musty odors, and other signs that mold may be forming. Following mold prevention guidelines is the best safeguard against this uninvited and potentially harmful guest.

\*Note: See the EPA publication listed below for more information on what to do with wet materials.

**Remember: mold loves to find places to hide in your home. Just because you cannot see it right away does not mean it is not there!**

**Sources:**

"Mold in Homes," Minnesota Health Department.

"A Brief Guide to Mold, Moisture, and Your Home," U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

"Mildew Prevention and Removal," Cooperative Extension Service, University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences.

**Reviewers:** Joseph Wysocki, USDA/CSREES Housing & Environment National Program Leader. John Worley, University of Georgia Biological and Agricultural Engineering.

**Research Assistant:** Philip M. Herrington

**Circular 1047-2 (HACE-E-53) / Reviewed May 2014**

The University of Georgia, Fort Valley State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and counties of the state cooperating. UGA Extension offers educational programs, assistance and materials to all people without regard to race, color, national origin, age, gender or disability.

**The University of Georgia is committed to principles of equal opportunity and affirmative action.**

