

Preventing Mold Growth

Introduction

Water in your home can come from many sources. It can leak or seep through basement floors. Showers or cooking can add moisture to your home. The amount of moisture the air in your home can hold depends on the temperature of the air. As the temperature goes down, air is able to hold less moisture. This is why, in cold weather, moisture condenses on cold surfaces (for example, drops of water form on the inside of a window). This moisture can encourage mold to grow.

Moisture On Windows

Your humidistat is set too high if excessive moisture collects on windows and other cold surfaces. Excess humidity for a prolonged time can damage walls especially when outdoor air temperatures are very low. Excess moisture condenses on window glass because the glass is cold. Other sources of excess moisture besides overuse of a humidifier may be long showers, running water for other uses, boiling or steaming in cooking, plants, and drying clothes indoors. A tight, energy efficient house holds more moisture inside; you may need to run a kitchen or bath ventilating fan sometimes, or open a window briefly. Storm windows and caulking around windows keep the interior glass warmer and reduce condensation of moisture there.

Controlling Moisture

Put a plastic cover over dirt in crawlspaces to prevent moisture from coming in from the ground. Be sure crawlspaces are well-ventilated.

Fix leaks and seepage. If water is entering the house from the outside, your options range from simple landscaping to extensive excavation and waterproofing. The ground should slope away from the house. Water in the basement can result from the lack of gutters or a water flow toward the house. Water leaks in pipes or around tubs and sinks can provide a place for mold to grow.

Use exhaust fans in bathrooms and kitchens to remove moisture to the outside (not into the attic). Vent your clothes dryer to the outside.

Turn off certain appliances (such as humidifiers or kerosene heaters) if you notice moisture on windows and other surfaces.

Use dehumidifiers and air conditioners, especially in hot, humid weather, to reduce moisture in the air, but be sure that the appliances themselves don't become sources of mold.

Raise the temperature of cold surfaces where moisture condenses. Use insulation or storm windows. Keep doors open between rooms (especially doors to closets, which may be colder than the rooms) to increase circulation. Increase air circulation by using fans and by moving furniture from wall corners to promote air and heat circulation.

Pay special attention to carpet on concrete floors. Carpet can absorb moisture and serve as a place for biological pollutants to grow. Use area rugs which can be taken up and washed often.

This fact sheet provides information from the Purdue Cooperative Extension Service.

For more information contact your local county Extension office. Summer, 2005

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