



Issue #07 - May 7, 2010

House/Home guide

A House is Given the Bug Test

By Susan Galardi



Gutters: GOOD! They drain below surface-no water pouring on your house. Space around pipe: BAD! Mousies can get in. Plantings away from house: GOOD! Limits moisture. Defunct dryer vent: BAD! Should have a screen to keep out varmints. Photos Susan Galardi

Sometimes, living in the Hamptons, I feel like I have a split personality - one is Eva Gabor and the other is Eddie Albert. Yes. My psyche is divided between the two lead characters from the ridiculous sitcom, "Green Acres."

I love the Hamptons - keep Manhattan and gimme that countryside, I say. But I get my Eva Gabor up when it comes to pests. Ants, paper wasp nests, ticks, mosquitos and especially things like termites that could aversely affect my ROI - in other words, make me have to pay someone to repair termite or other damage.

But it is spring in the Hamptons. Time to get your self tanner started, do some serious garden work (in other words, call the landscape company), and assess the havoc caused by bugs and animals.

There are lots of great pest companies on the East End that range from the all out chemical blasters to the humane "pest removers." Our advice here at Dan's? Go with the

least toxic route first - chemicals leach into the water system we all share, and end up on all of our bodies.

The best way to avoid crisis management is to do a systematic, regular assessment of your house.

I had the advantage here: Steve Free, owner of The Bug Stops Here, a company that has been working all over the East End for more than 20 years, came to my house to see if it passed muster.

Free's company should really be called, "The bug stops out there," because while his team will rid you of pests in your house, they will, more importantly, find the source OUTside and remedy that (like carpenter ants, which nest in trees, and come to your house for food). He also, it would seem, has a business model that is doomed to fail.

"I teach people not to need me," he said. Considering his company visits 2,000 homes a month, somehow that model works. His teaching is based on two principles: Keep your house dry and seal tiny entry points for vermin. "Don't water your house," said Free, a very good natured bug guy. "Direct sprinklers away from the exterior."

Rule number two: "It might look odd when you get up to the door, but keep plantings a few feet out from the house."

Rule number three: Locate/seal points of entry.

As we toured the exterior of my house, Free pointed out potential danger zones. If you don't have the clout to get a first rate bug guy like him to your house, check out his blog at thebugstosphere.com. Below are a few suggestions on Pest Prevention:

Examine exterior walls, cabinets and closets for holes and cracks. Repair with a wall-patching compound such as Spackle. Mice are known to squeeze through holes as small as a nickel. Make sure that doors seal well. Proper weather stripping will ensure a tight seal and keep bugs out.

Keep food, including pet food, properly sealed and inside. If you have fruit trees, harvest ripe fruit and pick up fallen fruit immediately. If you want to feed the birds, get rodent-proof bird feeders.

Clear away bricks or boards stacked near the home, as well as leaves and brush. They create ideal nesting locations. Don't stack firewood near your house. Keep it in a sealed, elevated cabinet at least 20 feet away.

Have your roof inspected every 2-3 years for signs of decay, water damage and mold. Keep basements, attics, and crawl spaces well ventilated and dry. Fix leaking fixtures right away. Water damage causes wood to be soft and moldy, creating an ideal habitat for certain bugs.

When to call a Pro: If you have signs of an infestation. Note where the pests were first seen and any damage they may have caused. Don't handle heavy-duty pesticides yourself, call someone who's licensed and trained to handle potentially harmful pest control substances.

Free said an inspector worth his salt will do a complete inspection of the home and adjacent areas to determine the extent of the problem, identify the type of pest, nesting locations, entry points, and food supplies; and consider all control methods.

Oh, and The Bug Stops Here has another interesting business approach: "We don't charge you because you live in the Hamptons," said Free.

Yep. Ants, termites and other bugs in Sagaponack or Shoreham are on the same rate card.