

Fact Sheet – Silverfish (*Leptisma saccharina*)



Silverfish are a very common household pest.

How to spot them

They are long, slim, scaly, segmented, wingless insects, with a pair of long fine antennae at the front and three tail-like appendages at the rear. Silverfish grow to about 12mm in length. The silverfish, as its name implies, is silvery and glistens in appearance.

Habitat

Silverfish are found in fairly moist areas such as kitchens, larders and mainly in bathrooms and basements. They can also be found in books and paper, slightly damp cupboards, behind skirting boards and loose wallpaper.

Silverfish are nocturnal and move very rapidly when disturbed and just turning on a light can make them run for cover. The silverfish feed mainly on small food particles and the paste on the back of wallpaper that has become detached. It attacks gums and glues of bookbinding, feeds on fragments of dead insects and may also eat textiles such as cotton and linen.

Life cycle

The female silverfish is believed to lay about 100 eggs, either singly or in groups, usually in crevices and cracks and glued to the surface on which they are laid. They are small and white when first laid but soon turn brownish and are difficult to find. The time they take to hatch varies from two to eight weeks, depending on the temperature and humidity of the breeding site. Newly hatched insects are about 2mm long and resemble the adults in appearance. The time they take to reach maturity may vary from a few months to over a year, depending on the temperature and humidity of their surroundings.

Control

When only a few silverfish are seen it is not necessary to take any action other than checking for damp. If large numbers of these insects trouble you they are easily controlled with a normal insect spray or dust which can be bought from most hardware stores. Look for the products that are specifically designed to deal with crawling insects.

Dampness

The presence of silver fish is an indication of damp conditions. This may be a warning that repairs are needed. Look at the floor, walls and ceiling for signs of staining due to dampness. Check that all the water pipes, gutters and damp proof courses are intact.

Another common problem is condensation sometimes caused by drying washing indoors (especially by an unventilated tumble drier) or by cooking.

ALWAYS READ THE LABEL BEFORE USING ANY INSECTICIDES.