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Trust a reputable professional when treating home for termites

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Q: I have a home on a steep slope. The home is three stories high and is built around an atrium (exposing the original hillside in the middle of the atrium). During construction, debris and wood construction materials may have been covered up under the soil in the atrium. Along the exterior of our house, we have concrete stairs attached directly to the foundation walls.

In November, we noticed a couple of earth funnels about 2 inches high at four spots in the middle of the atrium, and when I broke one of them, I saw the winged subterranean termites. A company confirmed the existence of subterranean termites in our soil. Its representatives looked under the house and in the area immediately adjacent to where the critters showed up, and did not find evidence of any further termite activity. They presented us with an estimate to treat the inside of our foundation under the house and spot-treat the known areas of termite funnels.

While awaiting their coming out to the house, we sprayed the termite mounds with a foamy substance from a can we bought at Home Depot that proclaims termite death upon contact, and it did the trick.

Can I purchase some pesticides to do the preventive spraying myself on the inside walls and sill plates of our structure? Is this advisable? Or should I bite the bullet and pay the exorbitant price for this company to do the spraying?

A: Generally I recommend hiring a professional to treat for termites. While the price may seem exorbitant, it is relatively small compared with the damage the termites can do if left alone or if improperly treated. Having said that, be very careful whom you hire.

Not all termite companies are the same. Never go for the lowest price, as you get what you pay for. Make sure the company uses Termidor, which is, in my opinion, the most effective termiticide on the market. Ask for and check references.

Q: I am sick and tired of cleaning up mouse droppings and setting traps. We live in a house in Santa Fe. I have set traps with everything for bait, from blue cheese to peanut butter, even Reese's peanut butter cups, bacon and pepperoni, all to no avail.

I did catch one tiny mouse with a "sticky trap," but my husband hates them. We often leave the back door to the yard open for the dogs, so I am sure we invite the mice to join us. Perhaps I am not setting enough traps or locating them properly. I know that a neighbor has used an exterminator, but I worry that our dogs may eat a dead mouse and get very sick. Am I correct in my assumptions?

A: Exterminators like to use rodenticides, which I never recommend, so I won't suggest calling them in. You can control mice yourself. Set out several snap traps perpendicular to the wall, with the bait next to the wall. Bait the traps with a piece of a Slim Jim (mice love Slim Jims). It won't be any time at all before you have all the mice in the house. If you prefer, you can use curiosity traps that catch the mice alive, allowing you to release them outside. Ritz crackers are a good bait for the live traps. Your husband is right about the glue traps.

If you catch a deer mouse and it has hantavirus, it could be dangerous. The mice will urinate and defecate in the trap while trying to escape. Never let an exterminator use rodenticides or glue traps in your home. Always use either live traps or snap traps baited as I suggested, and you will control your mice.

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