

Rats...

Pest information leaflet



What do they look like?



The common rat typically has **brownish fur** on its back and is grey underneath, but colour can vary from white through to black. Adult body length is 20-27cm plus a tail length of 15-20cm.

Common rats live in any situation that provides **food, water and shelter**. In homes, they will live in loft spaces, wall cavities, cellars or under floorboards. In gardens, they will burrow into compost heaps and grassy banks or under sheds. They are commonly found living in sewer systems.

Why are rats a pest?

Rats **can spread many diseases to humans**. They can also cause damage to buildings and other structures due to gnawing and burrowing.

Rats can breed very quickly, two rats can produce 60 or more young in one year. A young female rat will be ready to reproduce at the age of 3 months.

Signs of rats

The most common signs of rats are the evidence they leave behind:

- **Droppings** May be seen which are cigar shaped and around 1cm in length
- **Noises** May be heard from under floors, behind walls or in the loft
- **Damage** Rats have to gnaw constantly and as a result may cause damage to belongings, structures, pipes and electric cables
- **Smears** Black greasy marks may be left by rats running over prominent objects over a long period of time
- **Holes** May be seen (5-7 cm diameter) in the garden with a smooth entry



What do they eat?

Their favourite foods are **cereal products**, although they will eat almost anything that humans eat. Most of the damage they do is by gnawing and ripping open packets but they also contaminate food with their urine and droppings.

How to prevent rats – prevention is better than cure

There are many things you can do to avoid having a problem with rats, many of them are simple and things you can do in your day to day life.

Environment

You can make your home and garden environment less attractive to rats by following these tips:

- **Poor housekeeping** This can increase the attraction of rats to your property, keep your house clean
- **Food storage** Keep stored food (including pet food) inside and off the ground and keep opened packages in sealed containers
- **Outdoor pets** Prevent your pets creating a food source for rats by attaching a board to the front of their cage to catch discarded food
- **Bulky waste** Remove any collections of materials (i.e. old furniture/carpets) kept close to your house as rats may use these to live in
- **Domestic refuse** Avoid the build up of domestic refuse outside your property. Use suitable containers such as wheeled bins and ensure they are regularly emptied and stored away from vertical surfaces where possible
- **Trees and foliage** Cut back tree branches so they do not overhang your property. Wall climbing plants should be trimmed and not allowed to reach from ground to roof level
- **Overgrown gardens** Rats can soon make a home in untidy gardens, especially if there is a local food source. Remove accumulated refuse, stockpiles of materials or plain old junk



Bird Feeding

Wild bird feeding is now one of the most common reasons for rat infestations around domestic homes. To reduce attraction of rats to your garden you should:

- Use suspended wire feeders with trays for waste
- Not put bird food directly on the ground
- Only put out enough bird food for the day and clear any spillages



Compost Bins

Compost bins are a good way of recycling but can attract rats. To reduce the risk of a rat infestation you should:

- Place a compost bin on a wire base, this will help keep rats out
- Renew damaged compost bins or compost heaps as they can provide a home to rats
- Not put household food waste such as meat and cooked food in compost bins
- Compost items such as fruit, leaves, general garden and vegetable waste

Control Measures

Trapping

Break-back traps are an effective way to trap rats. Use several traps and placed next to walls where rats tend to travel. Traps can be baited with a variety of food but peanut butter, caramel, chocolate, fruit and fish based products tend to work best. Check traps daily, remove dead rats immediately and either burn the body or bag it and place in the domestic refuse. Wear gloves and never handle rats directly.

Cage traps baited with the same foods are effective (especially outdoors), however it is important to remember that you then have the responsibility of disposing of the trapped rats, which can bite.

PLEASE NOTE – it is illegal to knowingly release a live trapped rat.

Poisons

Rat poisons can be bought from supermarkets and most garden centres. Poison baits should be placed in a safe location (up to 100gms) where rats have been seen. These should be checked every 4-5 days and replenished accordingly until no further poison is taken.

If poison continues to be taken for more than 2 weeks or is not taken at all (but rats are still being seen) you may need professional help and advice.

IMPORTANT – When choosing to use traps or poisons ensure you handle with care and always refer to the product label instruction **BEFORE USE** and follow these at all times.

Make sure traps and poisons are located away from children, pets and non target wildlife at all times.