

Rats and Mice Advice Sheet

What can you do to deter them?

Rats and mice have co-existed with human beings for centuries and, despite our best efforts to kill them, they remain common throughout the country. Many are kept as bright, clean and sociable pets, particularly favoured by children while their wild cousins continue to be demonised. Lethal methods of control are likely to cause severe and prolonged suffering, do not offer a long-term reduction in numbers and are ultimately a waste of taxpayers' money. Rats and mice choose to live close to people because of the ready availability of food and shelter. Interfering with both of these necessities, therefore, will deter them.

'The most common cause of garden rat infestations is the feeding of birds – reportedly by 60 per cent of households!'

John Bryant, wildlife deterrence expert

Rats and mice are opportunistic and will take advantage of the food we waste as well as the food we provide for other more popular animals, such as garden birds or hedgehogs. They will seek access to our warm and cosy properties to set up home and rear their young. Populations of both rats and mice are frequently overstated by pest control companies in a bid to win more work, with rats in particular demonised by them and by the media.

If you have a problem with rats or mice it will usually be damage to property, taking food or setting up home in your garden.

Mice

Access

Mice will seek access to your food and home, typically through air bricks, air vents or gaps around gas, water and drain pipes, and cable holes. They can squeeze through holes as small as 25mm.

What you can do

Block all access holes with wire wool, 'mouse mesh' (available online), or a sealant that will harden quickly, where appropriate. Only block holes when you are sure the mice are not trapped inside. Ultrasonic repellents can be used to evict mice and rats from your home. These plug-in devices emit ultrasonic and/or electromagnetic waves, which encourage the rodents to leave but cause them no harm. They are not expensive and can be bought from DIY stores or online.

Damage to food and property



Mice seeking shelter will also choose a location that offers a ready food supply. This can be most of the foods we eat but also common household items we wouldn't think of as food at all, such as soap.

What you can do

It is vital to clean all areas where food may be present: cupboards, floors, down the sides of cookers, anywhere that food may have dropped. All food should be stored in cupboards that are inaccessible to mice or in mice-proof airtight containers. This cleanliness must be maintained, as the normal daily use of a kitchen will produce enough crumbs to sustain at least one or two mice. This will ensure there is nothing to keep mice happy in your home. Humane traps, available at garden centres and DIY shops, can be baited with peanut butter or chocolate. Any mice caught should be safely released at some distance from your home, near a garden shed for example, and ideally with a little food and water to encourage them to stay away.

Rats

Gardens

Rats generally prefer gardens to houses where they will set up home on or under the ground close to a ready food supply, such as seed put out for birds, or compost heaps (which are also a source of warmth). The problem with rats is more about their reputation than the reality, and the pest control industry desperately peddles misinformation about rats in order to generate business. Black rats are very rare and prefer to live in roof spaces, often gaining access via climbing plants and shrubs, but will still be looking for a good food source.

What you can do

Almost all rat 'infestations' are the result of bird feeding. Sixty per cent of UK households feed birds, and

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much of this food spills onto the garden or is scattered deliberately. This provides ample food for rats and mice. In order to deter rats you need to remove or isolate the food source. Stop feeding wild birds until the rats or mice have gone, and make sure any human or bird food is stored in airtight containers. Be careful how food is disposed of, both in and outside the home. Being tidier will help deter rats in the first place.

Rats are 'neo-phobic' – they have a fear of new things – meaning they can't tolerate constant disruption of their habitat. To deter them, therefore, keep grass short, thin out shrubs, remove cover such as piles of wood

and debris around your garden and shed, carefully expose their tunnels and place obstacles in their 'runs'. If this is done regularly, the unwanted visitors will disperse.

Animal repellents, such as 'Get off my garden', can be scattered where there are signs of rats and, particularly, around sheds. These products are readily available in garden centres and DIY shops. Ensuring your garden is as inhospitable as possible will deter rats and mice. But be aware - it is an offence to use any product or chemical as a repellent unless it is labelled as such and used in accordance with instructions.

Summary

- Reduce available food, and use airtight storage containers and bins
- Stop feeding wild birds and animals until the problem is resolved
- Block access to roof spaces and buildings
- Use animal repellent around sheds and problem areas
- Keep grass short and thin out shrubs
- Tidy storage areas and remove unwanted materials
- Tunnels can be carefully exposed to deter rats
- Keep altering the habitat by placing new obstacles in their way
- Purchase a plug-in ultrasonic repellent to deter them from indoor spaces

Rats and mice live relatively short lives, and already have many predators to cope with. They mean us no harm and we could all learn to be more tolerant of these creatures. However, implementing these simple techniques can ensure they don't get too close and that we can happily co-exist!



If you need further help with rats or mice contact John Bryant - www.jbryant.co.uk - 01732 357355

'We've all heard the claim that you are never more than 20 metres from a rat – it's a complete fabrication!'