

RATS – Pest Control Advice

The following guidance is aimed at giving advice to residents about steps that can be taken to minimise a rat problem from occurring at their homes.

Where do rats build their nests?

Rats can live in almost any situation that provides food and shelter. Their favourite foods are cereal products, although they will eat almost anything. In gardens they can burrow into compost heaps or under sheds / decking. Inside buildings they can inhabit roof spaces, wall cavities or under floorboards etc. They can also be found in sewers.

Why should rats be controlled?

They can carry a wide range of diseases and parasites potentially harmful to humans. These are spread in their urine, droppings and hairs left behind in food packets they have ripped open or when people come into contact with contaminated surfaces. In addition, rats can cause damage to building structures, containers and other materials by their gnawing activities. There can be a risk of electrocution or fire as a result of damage to electrical cabling.

How can I tell if I have a problem?

Be on the look out for rat droppings, which are around 2 cm in length and resemble dark brown or black jellybeans. There may be signs of gnawing damage to stored products, pipes and building structures. Other signs could include burrow holes around compost heaps, sheds or decking.

What should I do to prevent a rat problem?

- Take care when putting out food for wild birds. Use a bird table or specialist feeder, rather than putting down large amounts of food on the garden lawn or patio.
- Home composting is an environmentally friendly way to recycle garden waste and kitchen vegetable trimmings etc. But meat, fish or cooked food scraps should not be put into ordinary compost heaps, instead wrap it in a bag and place inside a refuse bin with a sealed lid. Site compost bins or heaps on ground with a base of wire mesh. The mesh should be no more than an half inch (12mm) wide, to prevent rats burrowing up into the compost from underneath.
- The bases of garden sheds and decking typically rest on wooden joists to minimise ground damp problems. The gaps between such joists can provide an ideal home for rats. It is therefore recommended that such structures be built on a concrete base (to prevent rats burrowing up into the voids) and any exposed side gaps should be sealed with close fitting wire mesh.
- If you have an aviary or keep animals in an outdoor enclosure or hutch, you should take extra care. Spilt animal feed, accumulated droppings or bedding material can attract vermin. Feed should be stored in sealed rigid containers.
- Do not leave household or animal waste in simple plastic bags where rats can get at them. Place waste in a refuse bin with a tight fitting lid.
- Rats can squeeze through gaps as small as 20 mm in diameter, so keep your home in good repair so they cannot get inside. For example ensure drain inspection covers are in place and fit properly. Use brush strips where there is a gap under outside doors to prevent rodents entering under it. Seal cracks and openings around water pipes and vents with proprietary filler or sand and cement. Repair any broken airbricks, so that there are no large gaps. Rats are excellent climbers so open eaves in older style houses should be wired over (but do not stop loft ventilation).

- Avoid littering, especially takeaway foods, it is unsightly and can encourage rats. Put unwanted food, containers and food wrappings into a rubbish bin.
- Unwanted household furniture, carpets, mattresses etc should not be left to rot in a garden, since it might provide shelter for rats. Contact the Council's Amenity Services for information about disposal of bulky items or take them to the local Civic Amenity Tip site (Metcalf Way).

What should I do if I have a rat problem?

Telephone 01293 438000 to arrange an appointment for our Pest Control Officer to visit. Any rat poison laid down by our staff should be left alone and will be examined when a revisit is made. All pesticides are applied by an experienced officer to ensure the safety of the public and other animals.