

Dealing with rats

Rats are a serious pest, as they are known to carry and transmit diseases, contaminate food and utensils and eat and damage fruit and other crops growing in people's yards. The constant gnawing of rats can cause damage to doors, skirting boards, furniture, pipes, wiring and cables.

The presence of rats is usually regarded as undesirable and we will never be able to entirely rid this pest from our environment, however you can certainly minimise the risk of being over-run in the home.

How do I know if I have rats?

Look out for:

- Droppings, about 10mm in length, thin, black, and have fur intertwined in them.
- A beaten path where they have developed a 'run' that leads to their shelter.
- Greasy marks along the paths they travel.
- Burrow holes around buildings.
- Damage caused by gnawing.
- Signs of fruit and vegetables that have been eaten.
- Pets that are more excitable than usual.

- Squeaking, gnawing or movement noises in the walls, cupboards, and ceilings and under floors.

Remember rats are generally most active at night. If seen during the day, the rat is possibly very hungry because of over population or because food is readily available.

How to avoid rat problems

Rats can be discouraged by denying them food and shelter.

Deny rats food

- Where there are fruit and nut trees, regularly rake up any fallen fruit from the ground and dispose of it appropriately.
- Keep chicken coops and bird aviaries clean, ensure excess seed or food is not left lying around.
- Place all food scraps in a container with a tight fitting lid. Ensure that compost bins are rat proof and that scraps are not left where rats can gain access. Remember that meat scraps should never be composted.
- Keep animal food in rat proof containers and wash pet food bowls after they have finished eating.



Deny rats shelter

- Clear your house and land of all rubbish, timber, building material etc. or stack it at least 300mm off the ground and away from fences.
- Do not allow vegetation to get out of control; keep lawns short all year round and remove garden refuse.
- Keep your garage and shed neat and tidy.
- Repair any holes or other access points around buildings, fences and concrete slabs.

Continued overleaf

How to destroy rats

Rats can be destroyed by baiting or by trapping.

Baiting

Poison baits are the most common and successful way of destroying rats. There are many varieties of rat baits (rodenticides) available for sale in retail shops. They work by introducing a poison into the rat's body, which stops the blood from clotting.

For best results place large quantities of bait in one or two locations. These locations should be where rat activity is known such as along their routes of travel.

Rats have a fear of new things, which can cause them to show an apparent disinterest in a new bait station. However, after a few days the rats will become adjusted to the bait and should start to feed on it.

Baiting for at least two weeks is necessary to reduce rat numbers. Most deaths occur around seven days after consumption but may take as long as two weeks.

Precautions when using bait

- Ensure all safety directions have been read and you understand the manufacturers directions before using bait.

- Always wash hands thoroughly with soap and water after contact with bait.
- Do not allow bait to contaminate foods intended for human consumption.
- Ensure baits are placed in locations not accessible to children.
- Ensure that the baits are not accessible to dogs, cats, native animals or poultry.
- Electronic devices these emit electromagnetic pulses that deter rats. Their effectiveness is unproven.
- Licensed pest control companies have a variety of baits such as liquid solutions, powders and gels. These can be used along with the commercially available rat baits.
- Traps using unconventional methods are also occasionally marketed.

If poisoning occurs contact a doctor or Poisons Information Centre on 131 126.

Trapping

The 'back breaker' trap is effective where poisons cannot be used. To lure the rats, use baits such as bacon, sausage, nuts, fruit, peanut butter and pumpkin seeds.

Other methods

- Sticky pads. Place along travel routes; use food bait to attract the rat for best results.
- Live traps. These are wire traps with a trigger to close the door, much like a possum or cat trap.