

How To Deal With Rat or Mice Infestation

General information about rats and mice

The house mouse and the brown rat are common rodent pests. It is the resident responsibility to ensure that our homes, gardens and local environment are kept free from rodents. A pair of rats can produce several litters a year, with each litter producing approximately about eight young. The litter mature three months after birth and breed at the same rate as the adults. Rats can burrow for several metres horizontally. Both rats and mice are good climbers and can climb vertical walls if the surface is rough enough, and “shimmy” up between walls and drain pipes. Rats are also reasonably good swimmers and have been known to enter premises through the water-traps of the toilet bowl.

Why do we need to control rats and mice?

There are three main reasons rodents must be controlled:

- Transmission of many diseases to humans, including salmonella (food poisoning) and Weils disease (see below)
- Contamination of food and food preparation surfaces
- Damage by gnawing woodwork, water pipes, ad electric cables which in turn will cause house fires

Weil's disease

This is a serious and sometimes fatal infection that is transmitted to humans by contact with urine from infected rats. The infection can get into the human body through cuts and scratches and through the lining of the mouth and eyes after contact with infected urine or contaminated water. Anyone who is exposed to rats or comes into contact with canal and river water is at risk.

Disease prevention

To prevent disease from rodents:

- Do not touch rodents with unprotected hands. Waterproof gloves should be worn when handling anything which may have been in contact with rodents.
- All cuts and broken skin should be covered with waterproof plasters.
- Always wash your hands thoroughly after handling any animal or any contaminated clothing and especially before eating, drinking or smoking.
- All utensils and surfaces with which rodents may have had contact should be thoroughly washed and disinfected.

How can I prevent rat and mice infestation?

You have a legal responsibility to ensure your property is free from vermin. Householders can assist in preventing an infestation by taking a number of simple precautions

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- keep your home in good repair; rats only need a gap of 15mm to access buildings
- remove potential nesting sites by keeping yards and gardens clean and tidy, and by cutting back overgrown areas
- ensure drain covers are in place and in good repair
- seal gaps around heating and water pipes
- ventilation bricks and slots should already have a fine wire mesh protection. If this is worn, replace it externally with 3.15mm insect mesh.

- do not leave household waste where rats can get to it, close dustbin and composter lids
- if you have a compost heap position it on a hard surface such as on open jointed bricks, paving slabs or a fine steel mesh which will allow the liquids to drain away.
- secure any gaps beneath your external buildings such as sheds and garages with galvanised wire mesh
- follow simple precautions when feeding wild birds - see below.

Should I feed wild birds?

Feeding birds in gardens has become widespread and is valuable in conserving bird numbers, particularly in the winter months. However, the numbers of rats and mice in built up areas is considered to be on the increase and unsuitable bird feeding methods may be a significant reason for this. If you feed birds please follow these guidelines:

- do not scatter food on the ground
- do not put food on a bird table
- do not throw unwanted food waste into your garden;
- do use bird feeders with a catch tray to stop debris falling on the floor
- do ensure feeders are sited with care and suspended from metal wire
- do place small quantities in feeders daily to ensure they are emptied daily.
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If you see rats or mice in or near your property you should stop feeding the birds
For further information visit the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
website www.rspb.org.uk.

How will I know if I have rats or mice?

You may not actually see any rats or mice, but you will almost certainly see the traces they leave:

Holes - rat holes are about 80mm in diameter and are usually found outside in compost heaps, under sheds, in hedge banks and similar places. Inside buildings the rat makes nests in wall cavities or under floor boards. The house mouse is generally a pest found only inside buildings. Mouse holes are easily distinguishable by their smaller size, about 20mm in diameter.

Runs and smears - rats and mice tend to use certain routes regularly when they travel to and from their nesting sites, and so create pathways or "runs". Indoors on hard surfaces the runs are less clearly defined, but become marked in places by black greasy smears.

Droppings - the number of droppings, their position and age may help to identify where rats and mice are abundant, and where they are moving and feeding. Common rat droppings are between 10 and 20mm long and often found in runs. Mice droppings are like very small rat droppings, about the size of a grain of rice.

Signs of damage - signs of damage include gnaw marks, half-eaten food and damaged packing. The more rodents there are, the more damage you will expect to see.

How can I get rid of rats and mice?

Rats and mice are adaptable, highly mobile and breed rapidly to produce large infestations. This can make their control difficult for the untrained individual and we recommend, you employ the services of a reputable pest control contractor approved by the British Pest Control Association - www.bpca.org.uk.