

Rodent Prevention and Control

As much as homeowners enjoy the shelter and comfort of their home, mice, rats and other rodents often do too. Not only do rodents make a mess, they can carry and spread diseases, contaminate food and cause property damage.

Prevention

The first step in keeping rodents out of the home is exclusion. Rats and mice, the most common household rodents, most often enter homes through furnace vents or air conditioner lines that run outside. Other common access points include cracks and openings in the home, garage, sheds and other structures. Check inside all structures for any holes or gaps that allow access. Even a hole the size of a dime is large enough for a mouse to get through! Common entry areas include behind stoves and refrigerators, around where water pipes enter the home, attics and crawlspaces, basements and laundry drains.

Outside, look for openings around windows and doors, gutters, and places where wiring, plumbing, and gas lines enter the home. Small holes can be stuffed with steel wool, which rodents cannot chew through, and caulked into place. Larger holes may require patching with metal, hardware cloth, or lath screen. Make sure all ventilation openings are properly screened and in good repair. This will also keep other creatures such as birds, bats and bees from entering and settling in.



Limit the Menu

Removing food sources is another key to discouraging rodents. Store pantry foods such as cereal, dry beans and grains in metal or heavy plastic containers with tight-fitting lids. Food-soiled cookware and dishes should be washed and kitchen surfaces cleaned soon after use, and pet food should not be left out overnight. If food waste is kept inside, store it in a metal container until it can be disposed of outside in a rodent-proof trash can or compost container. Homeowners who enjoy feeding wild birds should locate feeders away from the house, as most types of spilled bird food are a real treat for rodents.

Control Measures

If rodents are already present, it is extremely important that they be removed prior to sealing holes and gaps. Snap traps are the most effective method of catching rodents; follow the manufacturer's instruction for best results. It can take several days for rodents to respond to a baited trap. According to The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, snap traps are preferable to glue traps or "humane" trapping, both of which can cause rodents to urinate from stress, increasing possible exposure to disease. Once a rodent is trapped and killed, it should be placed in a plastic bag and disposed of in the trash. Any rodent – dead or alive – should not be handled with bare hands; use disposable rubber or vinyl gloves.

Poison is Not the Answer

Avoid using poison baits indoors or out, as they can cause more problems than they solve. Pets and children may accidentally ingest these poisons with potentially lethal results. Eating poisoned rodents can kill cats, owls, hawks, coyotes, foxes and other animals. A rodent may die of poisoning while inside a wall or other out-of-reach places, causing a stench that can last for weeks. However, sometimes an infestation may be so severe, poisons may be the best option. In these cases, it is best to consult with a qualified extermination service.

Cleanup Caution

Rodents are carriers of Hantavirus and other viruses and bacteria that can cause serious, even deadly, diseases in humans. A person can become exposed to Hantavirus while sweeping or cleaning up rodent droppings as particles become airborne and are inhaled. In addition, fleas, mites or ticks may be present on the rodent, providing an additional carrier for the spread of disease.

What might initially be a minor infestation of rodents can quickly grow into a serious problem. With trapping, sealing, prevention and diligent monitoring, homeowners can keep rats and mice at bay.

If pests continue to infest your home, consult a qualified pest control professional to develop the best solution for your particular situation.

