Control and Prevention of Roof Rats

Roof rats can cause structural problems, eat tree crops, and spread disease. Clearing the yard and rat-proofing your house can protect you from an infestation.

About Roof Rats

Roof rats (Rattus rattus) multiply quickly. Slender and agile, they use fences as runways and invade buildings via utility lines. They can cause problems by eating residents’ tree crops while still on the tree, creating structural damage in homes, and by potentially spreading disease.

Diseases:

- Bubonic Plague: Although uncommon, high rat populations increase risk of outbreaks
- Leptospirosis: Spreads through food and water contaminated with infected rat urine
- Salmonellosis: Bacterial “food poisoning” transmitted when rodents contaminate foods

Where do they live?

Roof rats nest in a variety of material commonly found in yards and homes:

- Dense bushes/hedges
- Sheds and garages
- Storage boxes
- Wood and lumber piles
- Overgrown ivy and shrubs
- Palm trees and yuccas
- Your house

What do they eat?

They eat many foods, including items found in your home:

- Overripe fruit from trees (especially oranges and avocados)
- Pet food/bird feed
- Grass seed
- Vegetables
- Snails
- Ivy

Property Owner Responsibility

California State Health and Safety Code states that property owners are responsible for keeping their property free of rodent activity (17920.3). In extreme cases, where the owner does not accept their responsibility to the public or those living on the property, local authorities may be brought in to solve the rat problem, and costs will need to be paid by the property owner.
Prevention and Control

RECOGNIZING RATS

Learning to identify signs of rats will help you to avoid serious issues later. Here are some common signs that rats are present:

- Partially eaten fruits or nuts, especially walnuts, oranges, lemons, and avocados
- Broken snail shells around bushes
- Gnaw marks or teeth marks on plastic, wood or rubber
- Greasy rub marks on wooden or painted surfaces
- Presence of rat droppings: slightly curved, dark in color, and about 1/2 inch long
- Sounds (gnawing and running) from attic, subfloor areas, and wall spaces.

REMOVE FOOD SOURCES

Rats eat a variety of foods commonly found around the house:

- Pick up from the ground or harvest fruits and nuts from trees
- Pick up dog droppings daily
- Remove clutter and garbage
- Keep garbage cans covered
- Don’t leave pet food or water outside
- Clean up bird feed

STOP THE INVASION

Stop pests by blocking entrances to your home:

- Make sure garage doors and outside doors fit without a gap at the bottom
- Replace missing or broken vent screens
- Seal off holes or gaps between roof tiles and around pipe entrances with metal, concrete or hardware cloth
- Clear tree branches away from home
- Make sure all screens are made of 1/4 inch galvanized hardware cloth

RAT CONTROL

Trapping is a good control method in homes where signs of rats are identified around food, children, or animals.

“Snap Traps” are inexpensive and come in two sizes. The larger size is for rats and the smaller size is for mice.

For bait, use foods that appeal to roof rats:

- peanut butter
- nuts
- bacon
- oatmeal
- apple pieces
- candy

Place traps where the rats are likely to visit: runways like fence tops and next to walls. Make sure the trigger is facing the wall.

YARD MAINTENANCE

Remove places for rats to nest in your yard:

- Thin dense vegetation and ivy. Plant drought resistant ground cover that does not climb or grow higher than 10 inches
- Keep sheds and storage areas closed off and neat
- Keep firewood 18 inches off the ground and 12 inches away from walls
- Fix leaky spigots and broken irrigation to eliminate water sources

A Santa Clara County Vector Control District Technician can advise homeowners on appropriate baiting and/or trapping procedures, and will provide other information on the control and prevention of rodent problems.

Call for a free inspection: 408-918-4770.