



Rats

Introduction

Rats are very adaptable animals and have lived near man and his food supplies for hundreds of years. Problems can occur as a result of this. Rats can spread disease and cause damage to materials, foodstuffs and structures.



The most common species within the UK is the common or brown rat, which is physically strong, can jump up to 3 metres and squeeze through a gap of less than 2.5cm. Rats will seek out any environment that provides food, water and shelter. In homes they can live in loft spaces, wall cavities and cellar/sub floor areas. They also live and thrive in public sewer systems which can become damaged and allow rats access to your property. Drains may then require inspection and repair to prevent a re-occurrence. In gardens they are attracted by wild bird food, compost heaps, garden decking and collections of materials. By living alongside humans, rats can spread

diseases such as salmonella (a type of food poisoning) and leptospirosis* (weils disease) which can be life threatening. Rats can breed very quickly; two rats can produce 60 or more young in one year. A young female rat will be ready to reproduce at the age of 3 months.

Signs of rats

The following are signs that rats may be present:

- Droppings - may be seen which are cigar shaped and around 1cm in length
- Damage - rats have to gnaw constantly and as a result may cause damage to belongings, structures, pipes and electric cables
- Noises - may be heard from under floors, behind walls or in the loft
- Smears - black greasy marks maybe left by rats running over prominent objects over a long period of time
- Holes — may be seen (5-7cm diameter) in the garden with a smooth entry



How to prevent rats

There are many things you can do to avoid having a problem with rats, many of them are simple and things you can do in your day to day life.

Exclusion

You can exclude rats from your home by repairing external structural faults such as:

- Gaps beneath external doors - draught excluding brush or bristle strips can be attached to the door or the threshold can be renewed or raised
- Holes surrounding pipes - these can be blocked with wire wool and then filled with cement or expanding foam
- Air vents - damaged or old style vents with holes over 2.5cm can be replaced or covered with fine mesh (*DO NOT BLOCK AIR VENTS*)

Environment

You can make your home and garden environment less attractive to rats by using the following tips:

- Poor housekeeping - can increase the attraction of rats to your property, keep your house clean
- Food storage - keep stored food (including pet food) inside and off the ground and keep opened packages in sealed containers
- Outdoor pets - prevent your pets creating a food source for rats by attaching a board to the front of their cage to catch discarded food
- Bulky waste - remove any collections of materials (i.e. old furniture/carpets) kept close to your house as rats may use these to live in
- Domestic refuse - avoid the build up of domestic refuse outside your property. Use suitable containers such as wheeled bins and ensure they are regularly emptied and stored away from vertical surfaces where possible
- Trees and foliage - cut back tree branches so they do not overhang your property. Wall climbing plants should be trimmed and not allowed to reach from ground to roof level
- Overgrown gardens - rats can soon make a home in untidy gardens, especially if there is a local food source. Remove accumulated refuse, stockpiles of materials or plain old junk

Bird feeding

Wild bird feeding is now one of the most common reasons for rat infestations around domestic homes. To reduce attraction of rats to your garden you should:

- Use suspended wire feeders with trays for waste
- Not put bird food directly on the ground
- Only put out enough bird food for the day and clear any spillages
- Guidelines are provided by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. You can contact them at www.rspb.org.uk

Compost bins

Compost bins are a good way of recycling but can attract rats. To reduce the risk of a rat infestation you should:

- Place a compost bin on a wire base, this will help keep rats out
- Renew damaged compost bins or compost heaps as they can provide a home to rats
- Avoid putting household food waste such as meat and cooked food in compost bins
- Compost items such as fruit, leaves, general garden and vegetable waste

Control measures

If you find that you have mice in your home contact the Environmental Health Department on 01442 228543/ 228455, or email pestcontrol@dacorum.gov.uk