

Information on rats

Health risk

Rats are a major risk to the health of community. They can assist transmission of serious disease, including the plague, tularemia, leptospirosis and typhus fever. Their fleas, lice and ticks can also adversely affect pets and humans.

Their excreta and hair can contaminate food and utensils, causing food poisoning and economic loss. Rat colonies damage and foul buildings and furnishings, and they generate a terrible smell.

Rats' gnawing can damage building, pipes, conduits and wiring resulting in increased maintenance costs and have been known to cause electrical fires.

Rats normally come out at night and usually are not seen unless they are very hungry or present in large numbers. Their presence at night can cause excessive noise especially in roof spaces resulting in loss of sleep.

Rat behaviour

As a rat's teeth grow continually, gnawing is a necessary behaviour. Almost any kind of material can be gnawed i.e. electrical cable, water pipes. Rats burrow into grassy banks, underneath shed and is given access can exploit cavities in walls and roof spaces of building, which they use for harbourage, to store food and often nest. Rats prefer to live close to sources of both food and water.

Rats are good climbers and can climb vertical walls if the surface is sufficiently rough. They can also climb along fences and up bird tables to access food.

Signs of infestation

- Sighting of rodents
- Presence of droppings (12mm to 18mm long)
- Signs of eaten fruit and vegetables either in the garden or within the premises
- Greasy rub marks along paths they travel (usually along floor wall junctions)
- Burrow holes around buildings
- Signs of gnawing damage
- Increased excitability activity for dogs, cats and birds
- Squeaking, gnawing or movement noises in walls, cupboards, floors and ceilings
- Accumulated snail shells with sides chewed out

Reducing rat problems

Rats can be discouraged and controlled simply by denying them food and shelter:

- Keep properties clean and tidy, cutting back overgrown areas to minimise harbourage
- Remove matured fruit and nuts from trees
- If feeding wild birds, store food in containers, ensuring rats cannot reach the food. Any uneaten food will encourage rats to your property
- Keep pet dishes clean and store bulk pet food in inaccessible areas such as sealed containers
- Inspect your property ensuring that there are not entry holes for rats to gain access into your home i.e. around waste pipes from the kitchen and bathrooms, central heating pipes and air vents
- Ensure drains are covered and that manholes are intact i.e. no rat holes are present in the near vicinity of the manhole
- Ensure all household waste is enclosed in a rat proof container e.g. wheelie bin
- Keep doors closed to prevent access
- Store firewood away from fences and off the ground by at least 40cm. Firewood is a common nesting area
- Avoid leaving potential rat shelters around the property such as car body parts, boxes, old furniture etc.

Eliminating rats – baiting and trapping

Poisoned baits have been proven to be one of the most effective ways of reducing rat numbers. It is important to read the manufacturer's instructions carefully and ensure baits are out of reach of children and pets.

Trapping rats in the snap back trap is the best trap for home use. There are now available plastic capture boxes which can also be used. The best recommended bait is bacon, fish, almonds and other nuts, peanut butter, apple, pumpkin seeds and sausage.

Should you require any further regarding this matter, please contact the Shire of Toodyay's Environmental Health Officer or visit:

http://www.healthywa.wa.gov.au/Articles/N_R/Protect-your-health-keep-rats-under-control