

Rat Control: Part 2

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Rat-proofing your home

Successful rat control requires commitment. If you live in an urban setting, it might require you to get your neighbors as well as your city involved in their removal. If you live in a rural environment a farm or small ranch with livestock and outbuildings, complete control will probably not be feasible.

Remove as much food temptation as possible. If there is no food for the rat, the rat will move on. Store your food, as well as pet food, bird food and livestock food in rat- proof containers, metal with tight fittings lids. Don't feed your outside pets more than they can eat and pick up any uneaten food and clean up Fido's feces.

Don't forget to pick up fallen fruit and leftover garden veggies. Compost it in rat- proof composting bins or bag it and put it in your metal garbage can. You can also bury it in the ground nice and DEEP. Rat- proof your bird feeders and catch or clean up fallen seed. Rats like that too.

Rat- proof your home and outbuildings. Seal the obvious places: vents, openings around drainpipes, the openings in drainpipes, spacing around entering utilities, visible cracks in your foundation, exterior walls, and unsealed venting around your roof. Use metal flashing or tightly spaced hardware cloth if you need air flow, and concrete (hard to gnaw). There are rodent- proof exhaust vents for bath and laundry rooms. If you have drain lines that are no longer used, seal them. Close your pet door at night and seal the bottom of your outer doors with metal flashing.

Clear around your home's foundation. Prune shrubbery to expose the sides of your house. Keep plants that climb up the side of your house to a minimum, and if you have trees growing close to your house consider placing metal tree guards around them to prevent them from providing access to the roof of your home.

Now, the "icky" part--- getting rid of the rats you do have. If you think you have a lot of rats, or are very squeamish or tender- hearted (in a misguided sort of way) you might want to reach out to a pest control company. Check them out as you would any contractor you'd hire and let them do the dirty work. But, if you're a spunky do- it- yourselfer, there are several ways to go about removing rats.

Using traps to remove the rats you do have is considered the preferred method of management. There are several different types of traps you can consider: There is the glue board which is exactly what it sounds like, a sticky board the rat gets stuck on. There are electronic traps that

electrocute the rat. They're pretty expensive and haven't been proven to be more efficient than snap traps. Live traps are also an option, but you're going to have to kill it or release it, and since rats are not native species, releasing them into the "wild" is frowned upon.



Rats can easily fit into tight spaces.

(Photo courtesy of Google Free-to-Use Images.)

Snap traps, and their variations are considered to be a more humane way of removing rodents since they kill quickly. You can see that you've caught a rat and dispose of it before it gets "fragrant". These traps should be set inside structures so you won't catch other wildlife. They should be placed along walls that you suspect are rat pathways with the trigger side next to the wall. Use as many traps as practical. Place them every fifteen to twenty feet apart in suspect areas and bait with peanut butter. (It's sticky). Wire more solid bait choices to the trap so they can't be snatched off.

Check your traps daily, in order to re-set sprung ones and remove dead rats quickly. Don't handle the rat. Use a plastic bag like a glove to pick up and dispose of the body, or if you're using one of new plastic snap traps just slip on a glove and un-pinch it over the trash. It is also suggested, since rats are wary of new objects and not stupid, to just feed them a while before setting your traps, as a way of alleviating their fears.

Poison is another way of removing a rat population. Anticoagulants (compounds that prevent blood from clotting) seem to be the chemical of choice when poisoning rats. Some of these baits work quickly and some take multiple feedings to work, which are safer in the case of accidental

poisonings (more time to diagnose and treat), but if the poison sickens the rat, it might not eat it multiple times.



Above Left: Rats love spaces like unsealed pipes. **Above Right:** Rats can get in drainpipes, so you need to seal the openings. (Photos courtesy of Google Free-to-Use Images.)

These baits need to be presented in a way to avoid the accidental poisoning of children, pets and other wildlife, ideally in tamper-proof bait boxes placed out of the reach of those you don't want to poison. If you poison the rat, you may end up with it decomposing somewhere in your home. If you use a fast acting poison, there is the chance that the dying rat can be eaten by other wildlife or pets, and the poison will kill them too. It's uncommon but it can happen. If you choose to use poison, read the label well and follow the directions carefully. The label is the law.

Rats are not considered a native species or wildlife so you do not need a permit to trap or kill rats.

RESOURCES:

- Living with Wildlife; Old World Rats. Adapted from "Living with Wildlife in the Pacific Northwest" (see <https://wdfw.wa.gov/publications/00631>, and <https://wdfw.wa.gov/species-habitats/living/species-facts/rats>) Russell Link, WDFW Urban Wildlife Biologist. Copyright 2005, by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.
- Controlling Rats Without Poisons. Dan Stein. Eugene, Oregon. Northwest Center for Alternatives to Pesticides. info@pesticide.org (<http://www.pesticide.org/rats>)
- Principles of Vertebrate Pest Management. Dave Pehling. WSU Snohomish Extension Analysis. 7/2008.

Note: some hyperlinks in this article have been updated since its initial publication.