

Information about Rats

Rats are very adaptable and have lived amongst humans and food supplies for thousands of years.

The most common species within the UK is the common or brown rat, which is physically strong, can jump up to three meters and can squeeze through a gap of less than 2.5 cm. Rats will seek out any environment that provides food, water and shelter.

In gardens rats can be attracted by wild bird food, compost heaps, garden decking, fallen fruit/berries and various other accumulations of materials. Rats can breed very quickly; a pair of rats can produce 60 or more young in one year. A young female rat will be ready to reproduce at the age of three months.

Signs of rats

If you only see a rat once, maybe running across your garden or your neighbours, it may be that the rat is only passing through. Rats are in constant search of food and shelter so they often travel through land. The following signs will give you a better indication of whether you have a rat problem or not:

- Droppings – these are torpedo shaped and around 1.5cm in length
- Damage – rats constantly gnaw so you may spot damage to belongings, structures, pipes, cables etc.
- Smears – rats often leave black greasy marks caused as they are constantly moving over/along the same path or object eg on a wall.
- Holes – these may be seen in the garden, 5-7 cm wide with a smooth shiny entry, indicating an active burrow.

How to reducing the risk of rats

Bird feeding

If you feed the birds make sure that the food is not accessible to rats. Try using specialist bird feeders and remove excess food that may have fallen to the ground. Never leave food out overnight.

Rats also need to drink regularly so make sure you cover water butts and remove any standing water.

Dry outside toilets, broken drains & building defects

Rats can escape from the sewer system via broken drains, missing drain covers and dry outside toilets. Make sure that outside toilets are kept filled with water and in good repair.

Disused toilets should be sealed off with concrete and any missing drain covers replaced.

Check the outside of your house for any gaps or defects in the external structure.

Make sure all possible access points such as gaps around pipes are sealed; these can be blocked with wire wool and then filled with cement or expanding foam.

Check that there are no gaps beneath external doors; draught excluding brush or bristle strips can be attached to the door or the threshold can be renewed or raised. Damaged or old air vents with holes larger than 2.5 cm should be replaced, repaired or covered with fine mesh. A mesh with holes no larger than 2mm will also prevent mice from using an airbrick as an entry point to the property. **DO NOT BLOCK AIR VENTS.**

Compost bins

Rats will burrow under your compost bin or climb in over the top to get to food.

Make sure compost bins are placed on solid surfaces such as flagstones or concrete and they are covered with well-fitted lids. Never put waste for composting directly out into the garden.

Refuse and waste material

Dispose of refuse and waste material as soon as possible. Discarded rubbish left out in the open or in disused toilets will provide a perfect place for rats to live.

If you encourage rats onto your garden then they are one step closer to your home!

Keeping Animals

Clean up after your pet. Rats can enter hutches and pens and will eat any spilled food or even animal droppings so it is important to keep animal pens and hutches clean and in good repair. Store their food indoors and attach a board to the front of their cage to catch discarded food and stop it falling to the floor.

Surrounding Area

Report any problems in your area relating to refuse, waste and fly tipping to the Council.

Report local businesses who have overflowing waste bins or don't clear up after their business or customers e.g. takeaways not clearing up food waste and litter left outside their premises.

Using your own Bait or traps

Bait and traps can be purchased from DIY, Supermarkets and other stores.

Bait

We advise that loose bait is not used outside as there is the possibility of killing non-target species e.g. birds, squirrels etc. Bait can be purchased in pre-baited tamper resistant bait boxes.

MAKE SURE YOU ALWAYS FOLLOW THE INSTRUCTIONS ON THE PACKAGING.

Traps

Break-back traps can be used for the control of rats outside, but the user must ensure that the traps are placed in a location and in such a way as to prevent the possibility of access by non-target species.

These should be placed next to walls where rats tend to travel. You should use several traps and check them daily, removing any dead rats immediately. These should be double bagged and placed in your wheelie bin, wear gloves and wash hands thoroughly afterwards. (A spade, shovel or litter picker could be used to pick up the rodent.)

Traps can be baited with a variety of food but peanut butter, caramel, chocolate and fish based products tend to work the best.

Cage Traps

Cage traps baited with the same type of foods as listed above can be effective but it is important to remember that the rats will be caught alive. It is the user's responsibility to dispose of the trapped rats in a humane manner. Caged rats can and most likely will bite if given the opportunity.

PLEASE NOTE: It is illegal to knowingly release a live trapped rat.

ALWAYS READ AND ADHERE TO THE INSTRUCTIONS PROVIDED WITH TRAPS.

FAQs

Q I've seen a rat running across mine/neighbours garden, what should I do?

A If you've only seen the rat once it may be that the rat is only passing through the garden. Rats are in constant search of food and shelter so they often travel through land. Check your garden for other signs of rats, if you don't see any signs then we would advise you not to put bait down.

Q I've seen rats on land near my property, what can I do?

A It will depend on who owns the land. If it's Council land, the Council will investigate and take steps to put bait down if possible.

If the land belongs to Sheffield Council Housing, we can contact them to let them know there is a problem in this area.

If the land is privately owned our Technician can try to make contact with the landlord to notify them of a problem and ask if they would like a treatment.

We would advise you to put bait down in your garden, if your garden is near to the land where the rats have been sighted.

Q Does the Environmental Services use humane traps?

A Not as a matter of routine as we would have to visit daily and we would still have to dispatch any rodents we caught. In very exceptional cases we can use live-catch traps but additional charges would be incurred and these can prove to be quite expensive.