A message about rats

Rats are common in our urban environments. The rat problem can be reduced if each property owner takes action to eradicate rates, minimise food and harborage opportunities on their properties.

Health risk

Rats pose a significant risk to the health of the community. They can assist in the transmission of serious diseases, including the plague, dysentery, leptospirosis, and typhus fever. Their fleas, lice and ticks can also adversely affect pets and humans.

Excreta and hair from rats can contaminate food and utensils, causing food poisoning and economic loss. Rat colonies damage and foul buildings and furnishings. They also generate a terrible smell.

Rats' gnawing will damage buildings, pipes, conduits and wiring and has been the cause of electrical fires.

If rats are seen during the day, it usually means that they are present in large numbers or are hungry.

How do I know if I have a rat problem?

To check whether rats are about, look for:

- Droppings (12mm to 18mm long).
- Debris such as snail shells with sides eaten out, almond shells, chop bones etc. Usually found in the corners of cupboards, sheds or other secluded areas.
- Signs of fruit and vegetables having been eaten.
- Greasy rub marks along paths they travel.
- Burrow holes around buildings.
- Dogs, cats, or birds being more excitable than usual.
- Also, you may hear squeaking, gnawing or movement noises in walls, cupboards or in the ceiling or under floor area.

Avoiding rat problems

Rats can be discouraged and ultimately destroyed by denying them food and shelter.

A few simple precautions will prevent or help get rid of them:

- Keep firewood stack away from sheds and fences and well clear (40cm) of the ground.
- Don't accumulate garden refuse or junk piles in sheds or around your yard.
- Strip fruit and nuts from trees and vines at the end of the season.
- Block holes and other potential accesses around all buildings. For example, pipe and service entries, defective airbricks to name a few).
- Keep pet food dishes and bulk supplies in a manner that ensures no access by rats.
- Rubbish bins and compost containers should be rat-proof. Meat scraps must never be composted.
- Look around your premises to ensure you have not provided any other welcoming envi-ronments for rats. For example, overhanging trees, creepers climbing onto roof and pergolas.
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Removal of rats

Baiting

Chemical Baits are the most effective way of destroying rats. Many brands and sizes are available in retail shops (supermarkets and hardware stores). It is important to read the manufacturer's instructions carefully and check baits regularly to ensure they are not accessible to children or pets and to see if rats have been eating them.

Trapping:

The old-fashioned spring 'back break' trap is still the best trap for home use. Try different types of bait, i.e. bacon, fish, nuts, peanut butter, or apple.

Did you know

Rats are the world's most resilient animals. Did you know they can:

- Fall 15 Metres without hurting themselves.
- Swim 800 metres.
- Tread water for three days.
- Wriggle through holes a quarter of their size.
- Gnaw through lead and aluminum sheeting.
- Jump 1 metre vertically, 1.2 metres horizontally.
- A pair of rats can produce up to 15,000 descendants in a year!

Roof rats

Characteristics

- Adult head and body measure 16-20 cm
- Tail measures 19-25 cm.
- Weigh 150-250 grams
- Soft smooth fur that is brown with black intermixed; white, grey or black underside

Norway rats

Characteristics

- Adult head and body measure 18-25cm
- Tail measures 15-21cm
- Weigh 200-500 grams
- Coarse, shaggy brown fur scattered with black hairs; grey to yellowish white underside

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