

Rats and Mice are very adaptable animals and live near to man and his food supplies. Rats can spread life-threatening disease and cause structural damage to buildings.

The most common species in the UK is the Brown or Norway rat, which is physically strong and has been known to survive two days in open water and can squeeze through a gap of less than 25mm ("1").

They can produce 6-8 young every 22-24 days and are prolific breeders.

Brown rats are omnivorous (they will eat almost anything edible) and consume up to 30g of food per day. Rats produce droppings that are capsule shaped about 20mm long sometimes in small groups or scattered

Rats are more likely to be found outdoors or in buildings such as garages or sheds and rarely invade your home. If rats do enter a house they are likely to be found in cavity walls, lofts and basements and under suspended wooden floors.

In rural areas rats like to live by watercourses and can often be found burrowing into river banks. They are attracted into gardens for either food, shelter or both, so anyone who overfeeds the birds and consequently leaves food out overnight can cause problems. Other attractants are livestock and their food, be it a pet rabbit, pigeons or chickens etc. Rats can often be found living underneath nearby sheds or burrowing nearby to one of these food sources.

Untidy gardens with various types of materials or rubbish piled up in corners are also attractive to rats who may nest there. Compost heaps with their higher temperatures, due to the decomposing of garden waste etc., can also attract them.

Other access points are through various gaps around the external perimeter of your or the adjoining neighbours property. Gaps around pipes, broken airbricks, missing bricks or cement joints, gaps under doors. These are all common faults which the rats and mice take advantage of. They will also climb up pipes, trestles or any type of vegetation that's either growing up or nearby to the property. Once on the roof they enter through gaps in the slates etc.

If you think you may have rats or mice in either your garden or home then you need to act, as they can quickly breed and cause you all sorts of problems.

Rats and mice need to constantly gnaw, in order to maintain their continual growing teeth. This can be particularly troublesome as they chew through all sorts of hard as well as soft materials. They damage floorboards, skirting and joists. They chew through pipes and cables causing leaks and occasional electrical fires, damage is common to items stored in roof-spaces, they will also chew stored items in the garden shed or garage once they manage to get in.

Sometimes the first indication of rodents in the home is when scratching sounds are heard in either the roof-space or the cavity walls during the late evening and nighttime. Occasionally birds can also be responsible for these scratching sounds so it's always best to try and distinguish the cause first. Mice usually make their presence known in other ways, such as leaving droppings wherever they have been active, be it in the roof-space or behind items of furniture or equipment in the home. However, rats do not usually start to leave droppings until they are familiar with the area, so when first checking for signs you may not find any. If your property is quite old there is a good chance that there will be plenty of dust in the roof-space, by using a torch it is possible to see footprints in the dust if something has been moving around up there. Other areas to check for signs are the meter cupboard, the cylinder

cupboard, behind the bath panel (if it can be taken of), any cellar areas and any other obvious areas around the house.

Once you have identified the problem you can either contact the councils pest control team to carry out a treatment or get poison baits yourself from any of the large d.i.y. stores, garden centres etc. The two most popular baits contain either Bromadiolone or Difenacoum as active ingredients.

If you are decide to attempt the treatment yourself, start by placing a few baits in the roof- space, even if there are no signs or you are not hearing the rodents there. The baits can be placed nearby to the hatch if it's difficult to access. Before you place any baits around the living area make sure small children and pets can't gain access to them. Bait should then be placed in each of the areas you checked earlier.

Additionally for rats, if you were unable to find any obvious access holes around the external perimeter of the building, it is advisable to lift the manhole chamber in the garden or driveway and place some bait on the internal shelving. This will serve two purposes

1. if there are rats in your drainage system they will take the bait and
2. if not, then the drains can be excluded as a possible source of entry.

Rats are very cautious creatures and will sometimes avoid the baits for a number of days before they feel comfortable approaching and eating them. With this in mind you should make sure that alternative food sources are not available to them. Do not leave foodstuffs out overnight including pet food. Once the baits start to be eaten make sure you replace them as necessary, for if there is more than one rat a considerable amount will be consumed.

After they have taken the bait it can be several days before they die. It is also possible that a few days later you may start to experience a smell. If accessible, any bodies should be searched for and buried or burned but occasionally they may die in hard to reach areas and their removal would involve the cost of structural work. The smell can last for a number of weeks depending on the time of year and can be followed by the appearance of Bluebottles some weeks after that.

Try to ensure adequate ventilation for affected rooms, it will help if you could place a number of tissues, cotton wool balls etc. soaked in strong smelling disinfectant etc. as close as possible to the suspected areas.

Break Back traps are available and will ensure the rats bodies are recoverable but they can be dangerous to use and are sometimes permanently avoided by rats, a combination of poison bait and traps would be better for home use.(By law, traps have to be checked at least once every twenty four hours)

If the rats are in the garden, baits can be placed in or around the areas of any sightings. Care must be taken to ensure non- target species like birds and pets cannot reach the bait.

Garden sheds, out-buildings and garages can all be baited. Additionally you can place bait into the middle of lengths of piping from two to four inch diameter and about eighteen inches long. If you don't have any piping you could make tunnel shapes out of bricks, slates, timber etc. and site them around the edges of the garden safe from pets and rain. Again, the rats appearance could be drain related so check around the area of the manhole for signs of holes and if applicable make sure

any outside toilets still have their water traps in place. Once baits stop being taken leave them in place for another week or two, just in case there are others in the area, after which time they can be removed and safely disposed of (follow manufacturers recommendations).

MICE

The treatment for mice is much the same as for Rats. Their droppings are obviously much smaller being dark brown/black in colour and about the size of a grain of rice. Mice are not as shy as rats and will quickly start to take any baits, they are also able to squeeze through much smaller gaps (6mm) However, mice will **not** be in the drainage system but usually enter via holes in the external structure sometimes even through the oversized holes in the older types of air-bricks. They can also be brought into the home inside packaging or in boxes that may have been stored in a shed or garage.