

YUCH! There is no other way to describe the feeling when you find evidence of rodent activity around your home and garden. The current rodent explosion can be tied to two years of wet springs and mild winters. These have made an excellent growth period for rodent food sources and, with plenty of food, comes increased reproduction.

The nocturnal, disease carrying rodents in our area include:

- **Norway Rat: (*Rattus norvegicus*).** 11 to 19 inches long, including tail. Large body, gray with white underside. 4 to 6 litters per year, litter size from 7 to 8. Habitats are burrows beneath woodpiles/rubbish piles and moist areas. In buildings, usually stays on ground floor or basement. Eats variety of foods, prefer cereal grains, meats, fish, nuts, and some fruits.
- **Roof Rat: (*Rattus rattus*).** 12 to 18 inches long, including tail. Thin body, grayish black with pale yellow underside. 5 to 8 litters per year, litter size from 5 to 8. Agile climbers with habitats and nesting areas in shrubs, trees, and dense ivy. In building, found in attics, walls, ceilings, and cabinets. Prefers warmer climates.
- **Cotton Rat: (*Sigmodon hispidus*).** 10 inches long, including tail. Large body with blackish to gray grizzled appearing fur. Multiple litters throughout the years with 2 to 15 per litter. Habitats include grassy fields and roadsides. Prefers roots, stems, and can be damaging to fruit, vegetable and grain crops.
- **House Mouse: (*Mus musculus*).** 5-8 inches long, including tail. Small body with grayish-brown fur. Up to 13 litters per year, litter size of 5 to 6. Habitats include houses, barns, and other types of outbuildings. Varied diet.

Evidence of rodent activity includes finding droppings, noises (gnawing/squeaking) in walls/ceilings/attics, burrows/runs, and damaged fruits/vegetables in the garden and yard, presents from your dog or cat of dead rodent bodies, and nests in garages/boxes/woodpiles.

As with most pests, it is easier to control the pest while the populations is small rather than waiting until you are overrun. The methods for control focus on removal of conducive environment, blocking access, traps, and rodenticides.

- **Changing Environment:** Clear waste, trash and wood piles. Keep grass cut and tree limbs from touching house. Do away with bird feeders. Don't leave pet food outside all the time. Store materials at least 18 inches off the floor and away from the wall. Store food (human/pet/bird) in rodent-proof containers. Put garbage in tightly closed containers, preferably metal. Fix leaky faucets and remove water sources.
- **Rodent-proofing:** Cover all potential entry points with rodent resistant materials such as steel wool or metal screen. Keep doors closed and all gnaw-able areas covered with metal. Cover all unnecessary openings with sheet metal or concrete.
- **Traps:** Snap/cage traps and glue boards placed where evidence has been found. Baits should be changed daily with types including fruit, peanut butter, and nuts. Rodents are wary. When setting traps, for the first 2-3 days, use bait but do not set the trap. Then set traps when bait is being consumed. Useful with small infestations but labor intensive.
- **Rodenticides:** Most contain an anticoagulant, causing internal bleeding when ingested. It is delivered via baits placed along the rodents' usual travel routes and near burrows. Care should be taken to avoid possible ingestion by humans or domestic animals. Read and strictly follow label instructions.

References:

Wildlife Damage Management; Control of Rats and Mice. ector.agrilife.org/files/2011/07/11916_1.pdf

Pest Notes: Rats, <http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn74106.html>

Prevention and Control of Wildlife Damage. <http://icwdm.org/handbook/rodents/CottonRat.asp>

Managing Rats and Mice. <http://agrilifecd.tamu.edu/txwildlifeservices/files/2016/08/RatsMice.pdf>

Mus musculus. <http://www.iucnredlist.org/details/13972/0>

Managing Commensal Rodent Problems in Kentucky. <http://www2.ca.uky.edu/agcomm/pubs/id/id115/id115.htm>

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