



## **ADVICE TO MID SUSSEX RESIDENTS ON HOW TO REDUCE THE RISK OF RATS & MICE ENTERING THEIR HOMES AND GARDENS**

### **Bird Feeding**

**Should rats become evident in your garden area, bird feeding should cease until the infestation is brought under control.**

- Do not locate bird tables or feeder stands too close to hedges, fences or overhanging shrubbery, as this will allow easy access to the food by rats, as they are extremely good climbers.
- When using seed feeders, try to use some kind of catching tray to stop any spillage getting onto the ground below, as this is one of the most common causes of rat infestations in gardens. This also applies to peanut and other types of feeders.
- If spillage is unavoidable, then try to locate the feeders above a surface that can be easily swept, such, as concrete, and this should ideally be done on a daily basis. Bird food is extremely difficult to sweep or pick up out of grass areas.
- Do not hang fat balls around in bushes and on fences because as already mentioned, rats can get at them very easily, and fat balls are one of their favourite treats.
- Do not hang feeders or fat balls from the house i.e. from the gutter brackets, as this is an open invitation to rats or mice to enter the roof of your property.
- If throwing out household scraps such as bread etc., just put out enough at a time that the birds can clear up, so as not to leave any crumbs behind for the rodents.
- Taking bird food in at night, and sweeping up any spilt food is probably the most important point of all as rats will come out in the cover of darkness and feed more confidently. This can be a little bit labour intensive but will reduce the risk of rodents more than any other measure you can take.
- Remember, rats will eat anything put out for the birds without exception, and they will do it at any time of the day.
- Rats need to drink daily therefore removing a water source will make a habitat less appealing.
- Remember is that as well as food, rats also need harbourage, so try and keep your garden as tidy and rubbish free as possible

### **Proofing**

- Rats and mice will regularly get into peoples homes, especially in the winter months, as they are looking for somewhere dry and warm to spend the cold months.

- Check around the outside of your property to ensure that there are no holes through which they can gain entry, paying particular attention to air bricks which can often be broken, and gaps around waste pipes should also be filled with cement.
- Remembering that rats and mice are extremely good climbers, you may need to consider cutting down any climbing plants such as ivy and wisteria which rodents can use as a convenient climbing frame to gain access to the roof.
- If putting up a new garden shed, make sure that it is laid on a concrete base, or raised on bricks or breeze blocks to leave a 4 to 6 inch gap underneath as rats do not like to be exposed to possible attack from cats etc, and are much less likely to try and nest underneath.
- Decking can also be an attractive place for rats to get under and live, so just keep an eye out for possible tunnelling around the outsides, and as for sheds decking is better to be laid over a concrete base to prevent tunnelling. Bird food should also be kept as far away from decking as possible.
- Rats can squeeze through holes of about 25mm diameter so blocking these ingress points is vital.

### **Composting**

- Composting is a good way to reduce landfill and improve the environment, as well as being good for your garden and should be positively encouraged. However, there can be an occasional downside with the presence of rats, which like to take up residence in the bin, due to the warmth generated by the rotting process and the household vegetable waste being placed inside.
- There are a few things that can be done to greatly reduce this risk:
  1. When first installing your compost bin try to lay it on top of a wire mesh base to prevent rats from tunnelling in.
  2. Turn your compost regularly, as this will deter rats and will introduce fresh oxygen into the soil, thus speeding up the rotting process.
  3. When placing your compost bin in the garden for the first time, try to ensure that it is not too close to the fence or shed, greenhouse or any other structure, as rats will nearly always tunnel in from the back of the bin, which is out of sight. A distance of 2 or 3 feet is ideal as this will allow you to get around the back to keep rubbish from building up, as this build up often occurs and allows rats to go unnoticed.
  4. If your garden backs onto a stream, a railway embankment or even a roadside embankment you may be at greater risk of rodent infestation, so locating your new compost bin as far away from that end of the garden as is practically possible, will reduce the risk significantly but not entirely, as is the case with all of the above tips.
  5. Food and kitchen waste should not be placed in compost bins.

### **Treatment**

- Because of the health risks associated with rat infestations, professional treatment should be sought where possible.

- Where rats are present, it is important that residents follow good hygiene procedures and wash their hands thoroughly, particularly if there is a possibility that there has been contact with rat urine, droppings or contaminated surfaces.