

Information on Rodents from an Expert

Rodents on the Rise

They're sneaky. They're nocturnal. They are disease-carriers. They do hundreds of thousands of dollars each year in damage to personal property & they could be in your home without you even being aware.

According to Associated Press, an estimated 21 million homes are invaded by rodents in the U.S. each year. Drought & new development has forced rodents from their natural habitats to inside homes across the state of Georgia. Being a Pest Management Professional & licensed DNR Wildlife Trapper, I get hundreds of calls each year from homeowners with rodent problems. Here in Georgia, house mice, field mice, flying squirrels and roof rats commonly invade homes and cause harm to inhabitants and their property. Gray squirrels, although not nocturnal, are also a common invader of homes.

It is customary for consumers to buy rodent poison and place it in and around the home in an effort to take care of the problem on their own. Also, many homeowners set traps in the home in order to catch the invading rodents. Unfortunately, only a small percentage of homeowners with rodent problems consult a professional to deal with the problem and end up facing bigger problems later on down the road as a result. There is a very particular way that a residential rodent infestation must be dealt with in order to achieve long term control. A trained Wildlife Control Expert should always be called upon to handle these very sensitive problems.

Rodents reproduce rapidly and tend to inhabit the same areas over the course of time. One single pair of rodents can produce up to 150 offspring in just a year's time. Rodent populations reach such high numbers, in fact, that it is common for snakes to move into an attic or crawl space in order to feed off of the rodents. All of this can happen without the homeowner even being aware! Baiting or trapping alone is not effective because it is nearly impossible to rid a structure of rodents unless new ones from the outside are prevented from entering. Also, rodents are more likely to continue feeding on their current food source, which is oftentimes outside of the structure. This makes the likelihood of rodents being caught in traps very small.

Only the exclusion process can achieve total elimination. Exclusion is typically done by installing a special type of metal specifically designed to cover what is known as the "builder's gap", a space found between the fascia board and the roof underneath the shingle where animals readily enter a structure. Other entry points such as gable vents, foundation vents, plumbing and electrical penetrations, and chewed holes must also be sealed. Additionally, rodents are fairly lazy animals and do not like to travel far for food or water. A mouse will typically travel 5-10 feet from its nesting site for food and water, whereas a rat will travel 20-30 feet. In other words, if you see signs of rodent activity in your home, chances are there are more. And since rodents are territorial, once they have found a comfortable nesting site, they are there to stay! It requires a Wildlife Management Professional to be able to control a rodent population quickly and effectively.

Rodents cause damage to personal property and can even cause house fires. Wikipedia.org asserts that rodents have two continuously-growing incisors in the upper and lower jaws which must be kept short by gnawing. They chew cables, pipes, air conditioning ducts, wood, and other materials. These small animals are capable of doing thousands of dollars in damage in just a short period of time. It is also common for rodents to pull insulation from the underside of a crawl space or from the attic to use as nesting material. As a result, this can contribute to loss of energy efficiency, resulting in higher heating and cooling bills. In addition to the damage rodents themselves can cause to a structure, homeowners often contribute to the problem by trying to place poison around the property.

Poisoned rodents will often die in wall voids, air conditioning units, or inaccessible areas, and the smell is always unbearable. If a dead rodent is inside a wall, sheetrock must be torn out in order to remove it, which is a trial and error process of destroying walls until you find it. This can be very costly. If a rodent dies in an air conditioning unit, the entire unit may have to be replaced which can cost thousands of dollars!

Rodents can spread harmful diseases, insects, and airborne pollutants. According to the Center for Disease Control, mice and rodents spread over 35 known diseases. Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome, Hemorrhagic Fever with Renal Syndrome, Leptospirosis & Lymphocytic Chorio-Meningitis (LCM) are just a few worth mentioning. Studies performed by Oregon State University have proven that rodents shed viruses in their respiratory secretions, saliva, urine, and feces. Rodents do not have normal bladders, so they leave behind thousands of micro-droplets of urine per minute. Essentially, rodents urinate everywhere they travel. These urine droplets contain pheromones which attract other rodents. According to the National Pest Management Association, these micro droplets of urine cause allergies in children.

In addition to urine contamination, rodents also cause air contamination. Harmful germs from urine can be mixed into the air and inhaled through a process called aerosolization. A single pair of rodents will shed approximately 1 million hairs within a year. In homes with crawl spaces, a moisture barrier may help discourage rodents from tunneling underground where control is more difficult to attain. If rodents are present in a crawl space that already has a moisture barrier down, it is necessary to remove the contaminated plastic and to replace it with new plastic after all activity has been eliminated. The NPMA states that rodents will bring fleas, ticks, mites and lice into the home. A licensed Wildlife Management Professional can clean feces and rid the home of any harmful bacteria, viruses, and other germs. This will also rid the home of rodent pheromones which eliminates the likelihood of other rodents being drawn to the structure.

Different rodents have different behaviors and feeding habits. Trapping is not easy for someone who is not knowledgeable about how to position traps, where to trap, how many to place, and which bait to use. In addition to different types of rodents having different feeding habits, it is common for even a particular species to have varying feeding habits throughout the year. For example, during breeding season, a pregnant female rodent is more likely to search for a protein-based food source when she typically prefers fruits and berries. She is also likely to be caught in a trap baited with only a cotton ball, as females gather nesting materials when they are carrying young. Many factors will affect the selection and placement of traps by a Wildlife Management Professional after the structure has been rodent-proofed.

While many problems can be solved by do-it-yourself techniques performed by the homeowner, rodent problems are better handled by a trained professional who is equipped with the knowledge, skills and expertise required to achieve both short- and long-term results and control. A professional solution includes four steps: exclusion, trapping & monitoring, sanitizing, and the issuing of a renewable warranty. Unless these four steps are performed by a trained and licensed Wildlife Management Professional, a rodent problem will most likely persist over the long run. The Georgia Pest Control Association has a list of licensed Pest Management Professionals across the state that can assist consumers in finding a suitable company to help you rodent-proof your home.