

Rats in Our Community?



In cities like College Park, rats often become established near schools, homes, and businesses. Rat populations can grow quickly when conditions are favorable. When overcrowded, rats seek new places to live.

Where they go depends a lot on how and where we live. A site with no food or shelter will usually be avoided by a rat searching for a new home.

During periods of construction that disrupt the ground near a burrow system, rats may increase their above ground activity, increasing their presence in a neighborhood.

Keep in mind that it is the responsibility of home and business owners, not the City, to prevent and solve rat problems.

An unwelcome neighbor

The rat most likely to be found here is the Norway rat. This animal is covered by coarse brownish-gray fur, except for the tail, which is nearly hairless.

Although very small at birth, rats can grow quickly if food and shelter are plentiful. Adult rats may weigh 16 ounces and measure 18 inches from nose to tip of tail. Rats are excellent climbers, swimmers, diggers, and jumpers.

Rats can cause emotional, physical, and economic harm. Many people are afraid of rats and even the idea of living near them is disturbing. Both rats and their parasites can carry diseases that can be transmitted to humans and companion animals through bites, body fluids, and feces.

Like other rodents, rats maintain their teeth by gnawing. They cause property damage when they chew on wood or electrical wires. Many house fires are caused by rats that gnaw through a house's wiring.

It is important to understand why rat problems occur and how to keep rats out of our community. Is your property likely to be attractive to rats?

Rats need food & water

- Keep garbage in sturdy trashcans. Rats can easily chew into plastic bags.
- Rinse cans and bottles before you put them into the recycling bin.
- Keep garbage out of compost piles. This is a rodent buffet!
- If you feed pets outside, remove the food dish after the meal and regularly remove pet feces.
- Bird and squirrel feeders can attract rats, so try to contain and minimize spilled seed.
- Birdbaths or other pools of standing water provide a water source for rats in addition to a breeding pool for mosquitoes.

Rats need shelter

Rats live indoors and outdoors - in walls, attics and basements, or under porches, crawl spaces, and sheds. They often enter buildings where gas or electric lines pass through walls, behind gutters and through damaged or missing window screens. To keep out rats, check these areas for holes and make repairs using sturdy materials. Trim tree limbs away from buildings and reinforce weak ground entry points, such as porch steps or lattice work.

Most often, however, a rat will dig its own home. A rat burrow is a tunnel in which a rat constructs its nest. Freshly dug burrows have an entrance about two inches wide with a mound of soil next to the hole. Although new burrows may have one or two holes, established burrows often have many side tunnels and exits.

The soil and vegetation around burrows are often flattened into paths. Common places for burrows are under sidewalks and behind steps, under shrubbery, and at building foundations.

Burrows under dense vegetation may be hard to find. It may be helpful to cut back vegetation around trashcans and other food sources, or choose plants that you can see under.



Regular mowing discourages rats and may expose burrows. Piles of lumber and other debris also provide shelter for rats, and should be removed whenever possible.

We can fight back!

Making your property rat resistant is the best way to avoid living with rats. Each month, take a few minutes to make an inspection. Look for burrows and places where rats can hide and feed.

You may need to look more often in warm months when vegetation and rat populations are growing.

- When looking under plants and debris for rat activity, remember that a startled rat can be dangerous.
- If you live in an area that has a rat problem, you may need to consult a pest control company. Established rat colonies are nearly impossible to eliminate without the use of glue boards, snap traps, and rodenticides.
- Chemicals that kill rats are hazardous to people, pets and wildlife, so read and follow the label directions carefully. Rodent baits must be placed in tamper-proof bait stations where people, pets, and wildlife cannot gain access. *Know what poison you are using and keep Poison Control and veterinarian numbers at hand in case of emergencies.
- If you have a rat problem, your neighbor probably does, too. Work together to share information and offer to lend a hand. Rat management can be successful only if performed over property lines.

Businesses must ensure that refuse is disposed of properly. Staff should discard food in sturdy trash bags, secured with ties or seals before putting them in the dumpster. Supplies and equipment should be stored so that rats cannot get into or under them.

If there are obvious rodent attractants that have not been corrected after speaking with your neighbor or owner of a commercial property, contact Code Enforcement at 240-487-3570.

Ten Ways to Control Rats

1. **Look for rat activity and food sources each month. Take action right away, before things get worse!**
2. **Use rat resistant trash bins (provided by the City) or dumpsters to store bagged trash until pickup.**
3. **Rinse cans and bottles for recycling.**
4. **Remove piles of lumber and debris.**
5. **Avoid placing garbage into compost piles.**
6. **Remove uneaten pet and bird food.**
7. **Mow grass regularly. Eliminate weedy, brushy areas where rats hide.**
8. **Limit the use of groundcover plants.**
9. **Seal burrows into & under buildings.**
10. **Cooperate with your neighbors.**

Always use rodenticides and poisons safely and consciously.

For more info about pesticide use, call the Pesticide Regulation Section of Maryland Dept. of Agriculture at 410-841-5710, or visit their website at www.mda.state.md.us.

A pamphlet on this subject was initially prepared in June 2003 for College Park residents by the Committee of a Better Environment (CBE). This revision was prepared by City Staff in July 2012. For information about CBE activities, please visit www.collegeparkmd.gov or contact the City's Planning Department at 240-487-3538. For Code Enforcement information, call 240-487-3570

