

Norway or Brown Rat (*Rattus norvegicus*), Roof or Black Rat (*Rattus rattus*)



Figure 1 Brown rat



Figure 2 Black Rat

The two species of rats commonly found in Wisconsin are the Norway (brown) rat and the Roof (black) Rat. The Norway rat is stocky and tends to burrow along building foundations, beneath rubbish or wood piles and in moist areas around gardens and fields. The roof rat is generally smaller with a very long tail. Roof rats are good climbers and usually live in above ground nests in shrubs or trees.

Damage

Rats eat a wide variety of foods as well as cause damage to structures, packaging materials (such as seed packages) and containers by gnawing. They are particularly problematic because they can spread disease through their feces, urine and through biting. They may be infested with fleas and mites which also can spread disease.

When Are They Active

Rats do not hibernate and are active throughout the year. Because they are mostly active at night they often are not seen, however, they leave evidence such as gnaw marks, droppings, tracks, burrows and nests made of shredded materials.

Susceptible Plants

Rats are omnivores, eating a variety of food, but generally prefer cereal grains, nuts and fruit. The more common problem associated with rats is contamination of food stuff and animal feed from droppings and urination as well as damage caused by gnawing.

Prevention/Control Methods

Successful management of rats is dependent on maintaining good housekeeping in and around gardens and garden structures to reduce shelter and food sources. Off the ground storage of gardening equipment, supplies, boxes and containers as well as keeping the garden free of debris and trash will create an environment less suitable for rats. Rodent proof garden sheds and other buildings by plugging any openings with steel wool, wire screen or sheet metal can help keep rats out, however, since they are excellent climbers, be sure to seal off openings above ground level, too. Trapping can be an effective method for controlling rats, however, be sure to check traps often. Do NOT touch dead rats with your bare hands and wash your hands thoroughly after disposing of rat carcasses.

Additional Information/Resources

- University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources, Integrated Pest Management [Rats](#)
- Dane County UW Extension Horticulture Hotline [608-224-3721](tel:608-224-3721) (M-F, 9 am-12 noon, April 15 – October 31) or horticulture@countyofdane.com