

# Who Let The Rats In?

## Cooler Weather Attracts Rodents of All Types

By Barry Murray

During the winter months, cooler temperatures are a welcome change, making outdoor activities a pleasure. However, this same weather forces rodents -- one of mankind's oldest and most reviled pests -- to seek shelter indoors. And rodents love indoor activities, such as destroying homes and businesses and spreading disease.

It is estimated that there is at least one rat for every person in the United States, and more than 45,000 people are bitten by rats each year, according to the Centers for Disease Control. These pests (and their furry cousins) carry diseases and can be extremely destructive, chewing through building materials such as glass, cinder block, aluminum and lead. These varmints can enter a building through a crack as small as one-half-inch!

Mice and rats invade homes and businesses searching for grease and fat, which are parts of any self-respecting rodent's balanced winter diet. In addition to being destructive and carrying disease, rodents can be extremely difficult to eliminate.

Some common rodent vermin include:

- The **Roof Rat**, which is also known as the ship rat or black rat. The pests spread disease through droppings and urine. They live in coastal areas and are very common in seaports. Adults weight between five and nine ounces and they are known as vegetarians because they prefer seeds, fruits and vegetables.
- The **Norway Rat**, which is also known as the house rat and is the most widely distributed rat in the United States. Like its cousin the Roof Rat, it also spreads disease through droppings and urine, but it is stronger, more aggressive and bigger, weighing between 12 – 16 ounces. These rats prefer meats and proteins to fruits and vegetables, and they have adapted to cooler climates better than any other rat species.
- The **White Throated Wood Rat**, which is also known as the pack rat. These rats are desert-dwellers, living in the Southwestern United States. They build nests in rocky crevices and underground chambers and feed on cactus, mesquite and other leafy plants.

- **House Mice** can contaminate food and carry disease such as salmonellosis, rickettsial pox, lymphocytic choriomeningitis, leptospirosis, ratbite fever, tularemia and dermatitis. They can crawl through a hole the size of a dime and build nests out of string, insulation material and shredded paper. These nests cause damage to homes and businesses throughout the United States and all of North America. They have poor vision, but they compensate with a heightened sense of smell, taste, hearing and touch.

Fortunately, there are some simple steps you can take to prevent rodent infestation. The number one rule is to seal all food tightly and never allow food to accumulate in open containers. Additionally, if rodent droppings are found, they should be immediately cleaned and you should call a pest control service.

Beyond these basic steps, there are a number of common sense actions you can take to discourage rodents from entering or populating a building.

- Check for torn screens and loose attic vents. Seemingly insignificant openings can give rodents access to your home or business.
- Be certain that garbage can lids fit securely.
- Do not allow piles of lumber or other debris to accumulate and eliminate overgrown, weedy patches of flora. They provide attractive shelter for rodents.

Remember, it's much easier to keep rodents out than it is to get rid of them after they are in. You should ask your pest control technician to carefully and thoroughly inspect the exterior of your home or business, especially during the winter months.

It doesn't take much for rodents to make themselves at home in your home or business.

*Barry Murray, national spokesperson for Truly Nolen, has appeared in more than 500 television segments nationally as the "Jack Hanna of Bugs" and has nearly 15 years of experience in the pest control industry. Barry brings an informative as well as unique and entertaining perspective to consumers' pest problems in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.*