

EEEEK!, I saw a MOUSE!
I hate mice....I can't live with mice....I need to get rid of my MICE!

Your best bet for avoiding rat and mice infestations is to make your home impenetrable and inhospitable.

Ideally, what you would like to do is make it impossible for them to enter your house, and they'll move on.

Here are four key tips:

1. . Take away the grub. Put all foodstuffs -- that includes dog food -- in metal or glass containers.

Just placing food up high in the pantry isn't enough; mice can crawl up even vertical surfaces that have a texture. Do your eating and drinking in the kitchen so you do not leave trails of goodies for the mice throughout your home. Clean up promptly after meals and don't leave food, or leftovers sitting out.

2. Close your doors. When entering and exiting don't allow the door to stay open, close it immediately behind you. Don't allow the door to remain ajar while carrying packages/groceries in and out of your home. This is a prime opportunity for mice to enter.

3. Make your lawn inhospitable to rats and mice. How? By cutting back vegetation that gives them shelter and food. Trim shrubs and trees that are next to the house to leave a significant gap between them and the house. (Rodents don't like to be exposed.) Trim trees so that the lowest branches are at least 18 inches off the ground..

4. Seal the entry points. Some mice can squeeze through a hole the size of a dime, and rats can get through holes the size of a half-dollar. Inspect your home's exterior, using steel wool, metal sheeting, caulk and/or hardware cloth to seal spaces around exterior vents and pipes. Make sure all screens are in place.

Install a "sweeper" that seals garage doors and other doors to the home. Remember that not only pets can use doggy doors.

How do you know if you have mice? Watch for these signs:

* Evidence of gnawing on hard surfaces, such as chair legs.

* Nests, possibly in drawers or inside upholstered furniture.

* Food and food packages that have been nibbled.

If it's any consolation, you're hardly alone. In North America, the roof rat, Norway rat and house mouse are the big three, making their homes right beneath the feet and above the heads of millions of humans. They're trouble, and not only because of the food they ruin and the mess they make.

What should you do if you've got a rodent problem and, like many of us, you're not a keen hunter -- if, in fact, you're rather squeamish about killing anything?

Here's some options:

THE LIVE TRAP

How it works: A live trap, sometimes called a tin cat, is basically a box with a trapdoor: A rodent enters and trips a lever that causes a door to fall, capturing the animal but not hurting it.

Pros: The trap doesn't kill the animal, which makes the trapper (not to mention the animal) feel good.

Cons: If you release rats and rodents into the wild, they're very territorial, and they may kill a new rat, or worse yet, find their way back in!

Cost: around \$13.

THE GLUE STRIP

How it works: A strip of ultra sticky material traps rodents that step on it.

Pros: Glue strips, called glue boards by exterminators, are sometimes used in areas with children or animals where a homeowner is particularly worried about using a traditional snap-trap or any kind of poison. They can be very effective for mice.

Cons: Glue traps have several downsides:

- They don't work well in dusty places when uncovered or in places with temperature extremes.
- The smaller traps aren't strong enough to catch bigger rodents.

But the biggest problem is that the devices are not very humane. Animals get stuck, struggle and then struggle more, sometimes suffocating.

Cost: as cheap as 10 for \$10 for small mouse strips to \$12 or more for a covered, rat-strength board.

Ick factor: Glue strips are pretty messy by themselves, and you often need to kill the squirming rodents you've trapped.

THE BAIT STATION

How it works: A bait station attempts to take some of the danger out of using poison indoors by basically housing the poison inside tamper-proof boxes. Rodents enter to feed and later get sick and die.

Pros: Poison indeed kills and is very good at it.

Cons: There are many arguments against using poisons in the house:

- Even poisons contained in a bait station can be carried out of a station and be ingested by pets or children.
- Pesticides could raise a stink -- literally. When they feel sick, rodents do what humans do: They go to bed. In their case, rodents bed down in your walls and crawlspaces. They will probably die there (The old tale about poisoned rats being thirsty and crawling outside in search of water was just a marketing ploy.) A dead rodent can be hard to find and clean out.
- A poisoned rat could leave the house and die, only to be eaten by another animal (or pet) and kill that animal.

In short, poison should be the last-ditch effort of the truly desperate

Cost: \$17 to \$60 for bait stations, plus rodenticide at \$12 to \$25.

Ick factor: potentially extreme.

THE SNAP TRAP

How it works: It's the classic mousetrap. A rodent is tempted to nibble on bait that's tied to a pressure-sensitive plate (a chunk of walnut or a piece of Slim Jim are both said to work exceptionally well). Or the trap is laid so that the rodent dashes across the pressure plate. A spring-loaded bale releases, (usually) breaking the rodent's neck.

Pros: Local health departments and exterminators alike still recommend this method more than any other. Snap traps kill quickly and humanely – usually

Cons: There's the potential for collateral damage, like small children, curious pets and adult fingers.

Cost: as little as 50 cents each to \$2 or more each for larger traps.

Ick factor: medium. Killed rats are sometimes bloody or beheaded.

No matter which method you ultimately choose, you'll want to be particularly careful about your own safety when disposing of dead or live rodents. Gloves are a must. So are disinfectants and the need to avoid stirring up particles of dried urine and droppings into the air -- a major way disease spreads.

Finally, all this effort could be useless if you do not take steps to keep them out to begin with!