

Pest Control.....

There's nothing worse than discovering you have an infestation. Getting rid of pests is entirely possible but there's one golden rule: **you must be persistent**. Half-hearted attempts often backfire, so if you want to de-pest, you have to commit to the cause. This is particularly true in the case of **rats** which **according to our contractor is nearly always due to scattered pet food (eg rabbit food), feeding birds (incl bird tables) or leaving food scraps after entertaining in the garden.**



Mice Mice are ingenious little things and at some point they will pass through your home in search of food and shelter. **The best thing you can do is make sure there is no food for them.** A messy, untidy kitchen with plenty of crumbs is heaven for mice. Be fastidiously clean and tidy, hoovering up crumbs on the floor and inside cupboards. Put all your food in plastic boxes and jars as they will nibble through paper and plastic packaging. If food is left out for just one night, mice will find it and come back to that spot. Do this in summer when mice are on the move, otherwise you may find mice camping over for winter. **It can take months to get rid of mice this way, but it really is the most effective method.**

While every single hole in your kitchen should be sealed, this isn't always realistic. Floorboards, holes in the wall for plumbing or electrical wires, air bricks: mice will find a way in and around as they can shrink down to the diameter of a pencil. You can tell when they've been using a hole as it'll be greasy, smelly and covered in faeces.

You can use poison pellets or humane traps. But these must be used properly. A caught mouse that is deposited in your garden will head straight back inside. Take it at least a mile away before you set it free.

Other natural deterrents include peppermint, which can be used as an oil or grown in your kitchen, or a cat, whose smell will deter mice from entering the room.

Ants



Ants are another pest that invade the home in search of food. Notice a common theme? So keep your house clean and tidy and food stored away.

You can deter entry into your home by lining doorways with salt, chalk, talc or baby powder. Spraying vinegar works too, as do liquids containing alcohol. If you see any individual ants in your kitchen, these are most likely scouts searching for food sources. Kill the messenger before it returns home.

That said, going aggressive on ants isn't recommended, as they do important work such as killing other pests like bedbugs and fleas, turning and aerating soil and spreading seeds. If you find yourself overrun then it's time to act by finding the anthill and pouring boiling water down it. **This should be considered a last resort**

Pest control – advice from East Lothian Council

Environmental Protection

The Environmental Protection team investigates complaints from members of the public and businesses about pests which are a threat to public health. **Where necessary**, the team has enforcement powers to ensure that owners / occupiers of premises take action to deal with pests.

Rodents (Rats & Mice)

- Investigate complaints from members of the public who think that they have problems with rodents
- Carry out rodent surveys of areas/premises where rats are believed to be
- Carry out enforcement action against anyone who has rats on their land and who is unwilling to take action to eradicate them
- **Provide general advice on rodents and rodent-proofing and provide contact details for pest control contractors where treatment is required**

Insects

- Investigate complaints about public health insects such as fleas, cockroaches, bed bugs, etc.
- Respond to complaints for honey bee swarms and arrange collection from local beekeepers
- **Provide members of the public with a contact list of pest control contractors if treatment is required**

Birds

- Environmental Protection carry out an annual feral pigeon control programme to help reduce problems with pigeons in the main towns in East Lothian
- Environmental Protection also carry out an annual gull control programme in Musselburgh and Dunbar where the gulls can cause nuisance
- **Investigate people who excessively feed nuisance birds such as gulls, pigeons and starlings and advise on best practice on how to attract garden birds to the area.**

General

- Provide advice on all pest control related issues
- Give talks/presentations to groups, schools and members of the public
- Provide information on legislation relating to pest control

Pests not treated

Whilst the following pests are not treated, help and advice relating to these pests can be obtained from the Environmental Protection Team:

- Bats - Bees - Gulls - Pigeons – Squirrels - Foxes - Rabbits - Moles

Wasps

The Wasp has yellow and black markings. There is a waist between the back part of the body and the section where the wings are. Honey bees are normally a more orangey brown and dark brown in colour, and are hairy. Hover flies are very similar to wasps, but the yellow and black banding on a hover fly is more definite and even. It is also normally smaller than a wasp.

A wasp nest looks round, grey and paper-like in structure. The entrance hole is usually found at the base of the nest. A nest is normally only used once. Wasps are most active during the day so the best time to treat is at dusk, when most of the wasps will be in the nest. Wasps normally start to die off around October-November time. This is when the queen leaves the nest to hibernate.

Wasps become a nuisance to humans mainly in late summer as the weather gets cooler when they become more likely to sting. A wasp, unlike a bee, can sting many times. Although the wasp sting is not normally serious, it can be very painful, and in certain cases can cause a severe reaction.

How to treat by yourself

To treat the nest, you can use an insecticidal powder or liquid that has a long lasting effect.

Warning: Use biocides safely. Always read the label and product information before use.

You will normally be required to spray the treatment around the entrance hole to the nest. As the wasps become active, they will tread on the treatment, taking it back into the nest - this will kill the queen, the wasps and the grubs.

The treatment will normally be successful within 3-4 days, but some times it may be necessary to re-treat.

I have found a "dead" nest. What should I do?

Wasps never re-use an old nest, so if you are certain that there is no activity it can simply be removed and disposed of. Any nest found during the winter will be "dead" and can be safely removed.

How can I get rid of live wasps' nests?

If you have a live nest that is not bothering you, then it is not essential to destroy it. However, nests can cause problems for your neighbours, so bear this in mind when deciding what to do.

Wasps can be very aggressive and if a nest is causing a nuisance then it is best treated professionally.

Rats

Rats commonly seen in the UK are either the Norwegian or Brown Rat. They are generally brown in colour with an off-white under belly. They can grow to 270mm long and have a tail length of up to 200mm.

Rats live in close association with other animals and humans, and are usually nocturnal. The rat has very poor eyesight and is colour blind. However, the rat has an excellent sense of touch, taste, smell and hearing. Rats are good swimmers, climbers, jumpers and burrowers. In favourable conditions, populations can grow rapidly.

Why must rats be controlled?

- Rats can transmit many diseases to humans, including Salmonellosis (food poisoning) and Weils disease.
- Rats will eat or contaminate food intended for humans. It is estimated that up to 5% of food produced world-wide is lost as a result of rodent activity.
- They can cause damage to buildings and other structures by gnawing and burrowing.

Where do they live?

Common rats live in any situation that provides food, water and shelter. In homes, they will live in roof spaces, wall cavities or under floorboards. In gardens, they will burrow into compost heaps and grassy banks or under sheds. Rats are often found living in sewer systems, they are agile climbers and excellent swimmers.

Signs of infestation

- Sightings of live or dead rats.
- Common rat droppings can be 12mm long and taper at both ends.
- Runs - rats follow the same routes when travelling and leave trails through the grass and low vegetation.
- Footprints and tail swipes - on muddy or dusty surfaces.
- Smears - dark grey marks left on surfaces by repeated contact with rat fur.
- Burrows - entrance holes 7-120mm in diameter in grassy banks, under tree roots, at the end of paving or drain cover surrounds.
- Nests - sometime found indoors, in lofts or under floorboards.
- Gnawing - rats gnaw continually, even on non-food materials, in order to wear down their front teeth.

How to treat and control measures

A high percentage of rat infestations are due to bird feeding. You should not feed birds during the summer months. If you wish to treat the rat problem yourself, you can either buy rat poison or break back traps from any hardware store.

Warning: Use biocides safely. Always read the label and product information before use.

If you choose to purchase poison or traps from any hardware store, you must follow the instructions carefully.

Preventive measures

You can help prevent infestation by some simple measures:

- Remove potential nesting sites by keeping yards and gardens clean and tidy, and by cutting back overgrown areas.
- Stored materials should ideally be at least 19 inches off the ground to make access harder and identification of infestation easier. Products should also be kept away from walls.
- Do not feed wild birds or other animals to excess - you may be feeding rats as well.
- Keep your home in good repair so that rats cannot gain access to it. Ensure that the drain inspection covers are in place and are in good repair.
- Do not leave household waste where rats can get at it. Food and food waste should be stored in sealed containers, including compost bins.
- Having a good housekeeping system for any outdoor pets, eg rabbits in hutches or pigeons in lofts. Poor housekeeping can easily result in a rat infestation.