



Got Rodents? How To Be Pest Free Without Poison

Are unwanted rats, mice, gophers or voles wreaking havoc in your garden? Although using toxic baits is convenient, their impact poses a threat to non-targeted wildlife, pets, and even humans in case of accidental ingestion. The toxic chemicals present in these poisons have the potential to cause severe health issues. Furthermore, the use of rodent poisons can result in ecological imbalances through a phenomenon known as bioaccumulation. The residues from rodenticides accumulate in rodent carcasses at levels far exceeding minimum lethal doses. This accumulation exposes rodent-eating predators and scavengers, like hawks, owls, bobcats, coyotes, and foxes, to dangerously high amounts of poison.

The consequences don't end there. When rodents consume the poison and succumb within walls or unreachable areas, they create foul odors and attract other pests during decomposition, leading to secondary pest problems.

Instead of using rodent poisons, opt for humane and safer alternatives, such as habitat manipulation, cultural practices, traps, or professional pest control services trained in integrated pest management (IPM) techniques. These methods effectively manage rodent issues without the associated risks and dangers of resorting to poisonous substances. By choosing alternative approaches, you not only safeguard your immediate environment but also contribute to a healthier and more balanced local ecosystem.

Identifying the presence of rodents in your garden

Rodent	Evidence of presence
Mice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Droppings, fresh gnaw marks and tracks indicate areas where mice are active
Rats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Droppings, gnaw marks, feeding damage on fruits or nuts • Burrows among plants or damaged vegetables • Smudge marks caused by the rats rubbing their fur along surfaces
Gophers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mounds of fresh soil, often crescent or horseshoe-shaped when viewed from above. The hole, which is off to one side of the mound, is usually plugged.
Voles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ground holes with a surface diameter of around one and a half inches close to their surface runways (raised ground on top of their tunnels). • Damage to the roots of trees, yellowed and wilting plants, missing bulbs, teeth marks around the bottom of trees and shrubs, and irregular paths of one to two inches of trampled grass or soil.
Moles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extensive underground tunnels and volcanic-shaped mounds. • Note, moles can be beneficial by aerating the soil. However, they can be a nuisance if they are damaging lawns.

Steps to take to minimize rodent damage to your garden

Begin by eliminating accessible food sources for rodents. Ensure that pet food left outdoors is promptly removed. Harvest fruits when they reach ripeness and promptly clear away any fallen fruit or vegetation beneath fruit trees, as rodents avoid open spaces. Store trash in sealed bins to minimize attractants.

Limit shelter options by sealing entryways, gaps, or openings larger than ¼ inch leading into your home or outdoor structures. Prevent rodent access to trees by trimming branches away from fences, buildings, and other trees. Prune citrus trees, maintaining isolation from surrounding objects, with a recommended 2-3 feet of space between fruit trees where possible. Install rat guards around citrus tree trunks, using sheet metal or aluminum flashing at least 18 inches tall, wrapped securely without harming the trunk.

Rodents don't like being exposed to predators. Removing "cover" from a location makes the space less attractive to these pests. Maintain a clutter-free landscape by removing wood and brush piles, keeping items off the ground. Thinning dense vegetation, such as ivy ground cover or shrubs, creates an environment less appealing to rats. Regularly mow ivy to ground level and remove climbing ivy on fences or buildings.

Protect vulnerable trees or plants from gophers by planting in wire baskets with openings no larger than ½". The basket's top edge should extend 2-3 inches above the soil or mulch surface.

Choose trapping as the safest and most effective rodent control method around your home and garden. For rats and mice, place snap traps inside bait boxes in locations accessible to animals other than rodents, and only set traps from dusk to dawn to avoid unintentional harm to non-target species. Leave traps in place for at least a week before repositioning. Gopher traps should be placed in active burrows, as indicated by fresh mounds. Use pincer traps or box traps, setting them in pairs facing each other. Regularly check and reset traps until no new mounds are formed.

Avoid using glue traps, as they are deemed cruel and inhumane, posing risks to unintended wildlife.

Encourage natural predators like barn owls and hawks by providing nest boxes. These birds are effective in controlling rodent populations. Create an inviting environment for these predators by planting native vegetation, fostering a cascade effect that attracts insects and songbirds.

If professional help is needed, ensure that exterminators are trained in integrated pest management (IPM), as well as exclusion and sanitation practices. These techniques are essential for permanently excluding rodents from your home and garden.

To learn more, please visit the following reference articles:

- <https://nwdistrict.ifas.ufl.edu/hort/2022/02/24/fruit-thieves-roof-rats/>
- <https://www.lyngsogarden.com/community-resources/vertebrate-pest-control-in-the-garden-deer-gophers-rats-and-moles/>
- <https://ipm.ucanr.edu/home-and-landscape/rats/pest-notes/>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZsB9Ku2jRpk>