

# Preventing Rats on Your Property



A GUIDE FOR  
LOWELL PROPERTY  
OWNERS

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## How to Use This Guide

**Nobody wants to live in a community with rats. If you do see rats in your area, or received a notice from the City that rats were found on your property, this guide is for you.**

To use this guide:

- ✓ Follow the steps to find and control rats to remove them, and keep them out for good.
- ✓ Remember that rats are a community problem. Talk to your neighbors, tenants, or landlord, show them this guide, and work together to follow these steps.
- ✓ Go to [lowellma.gov/1689/Rodent-Control](https://lowellma.gov/1689/Rodent-Control) or contact [rodents@lowellma.gov](mailto:rodents@lowellma.gov) if you have more questions.

**Two ways to contact the City:**

- Call 978-674-4144
- Email [Rodents@LowellMa.Gov](mailto:Rodents@LowellMa.Gov)

## How the City of Lowell Addresses Rats

Public property such as parks, city buildings, and public sewers are regularly inspected and exterminated through the City of Lowell's **Department of Public Works** (DPW).

The **Division of Development Services** (DDS) addresses reports about private and commercial property and handles all follow-up and inspections. This department also runs the Residential Rodent Control Assistance Program, which provides free rodent inspection and baiting to owner-occupied properties in Lowell.

Contact [rodents@lowellma.gov](mailto:rodents@lowellma.gov) if you see rats or evidence of rat activity on public, private, or commercial property.

## How to Control Rats

To control rats, you have to remove everything they need to survive: food, water, shelter and ways to get around.

### Step One: Look for Evidence



Gnaw marks on garbage cans



- Look for places where rats live. Most rats live in underground burrows. Burrows are holes in dirt or concrete that are one to four inches wide, with smooth edges. Burrows can be found under bushes and plants. They will often have more than one hole.
- Look for droppings. They are often found close to garbage. If they're moist and dark, it's a sign that rats are in the area.
- Look for holes and gnaw marks on wood and plastic garbage cans.
- Check walls and grass for signs of runways. Rats run along the same path many times a day, leaving dark greasy track marks along walls and worn down paths in grass.





Rats come out at night, so walk around outside with a flashlight after dark. This will help you see where rats are going, so you can check for burrows when it gets light.

Runways and tracks



Gnaw marks



Gnaw marks



Rat droppings



Rat droppings



Gnaw marks on trash bags



Burrow near sidewalk



## Step Two: Clean Up

### Wash Away Droppings and Track Marks

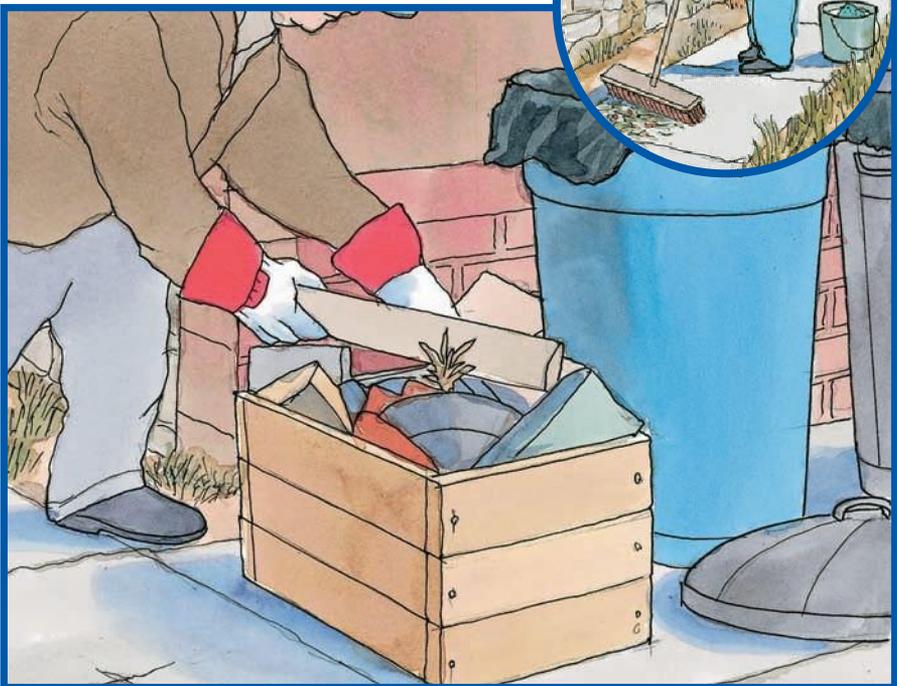
Rats communicate and attract each other through their urine and droppings.

- Sweep up droppings and clean up dark greasy track marks. Wash down the area with water and a mild bleach solution of one part bleach, 10 parts water.
- Talk to your neighbors and work together to clean up, so rats don't move from one place to another.

### Get Rid of Clutter

Clutter gives rats lots of places to hide, sleep, nest and reproduce.

- Remove (and recycle) piles of newspapers, paper bags, cardboard and bottles.
- Clear out your basement and yard.
- Store items away from walls and off the ground.



## Control Weeds, Shrubs and Bushes

Rats are often found in burrows under bushes and plants.

- Keep tall grass, bushes, shrubs and mulch away from building foundations. Pull out ivy around burrows.
- Keep the ground bare six inches from buildings, and trim under shrubs.
- Make space between plants and avoid dense planting.
- Keep gardens free of weeds and trash.



## Step Three: Starve Them

Rats only need one ounce of food each day. Don't make your garbage their food.

### Manage Your Garbage

- Always put garbage *inside* cans and cover it securely.
- Put trash in outdoor barrels as close to your pick-up day as possible. Leaving it outside for multiple nights invites rats.
- Make sure you have enough garbage cans to hold trash between pickups.
- Use hard plastic or metal cans with tight fitting lids.



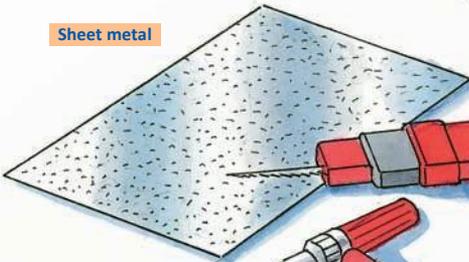
### Remove Other Food Sources

- Store all food in tightly sealed containers.
- Don't put food out for stray cats, pigeons, or squirrels, especially overnight.
- Pick up any seeds from bird feeders that may fall on the ground, take them in at night, or avoid using them all together.

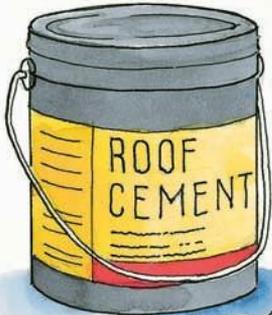
## Step Four: Shut Them Out

Rats chew holes into buildings, and can squeeze through cracks and holes as small as a half inch. To keep rats out for good, seal all holes and cracks in foundations, walls, floors, underneath doors and around windows. Most repairs can be done by maintenance staff, superintendents, handy men or pest control professionals. Materials are inexpensive and available at most hardware stores.

Sheet metal



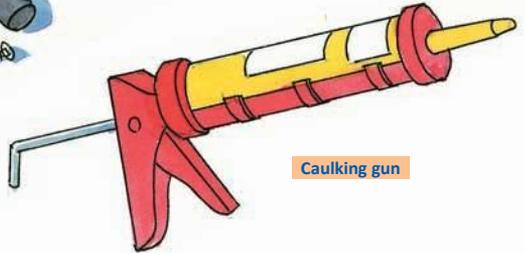
Metal door sweeps



Roof cement and trowel



Caulking gun



Tin snips and metal lathe



## Seal Cracks and Small Holes

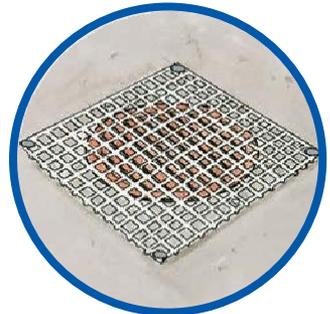
- Seal cracks and small holes with caulk. Or use roofing cement – it's durable and easily applied with a caulking gun.
- Close gaps under doors with rodent-resistant metal door sweeps.
- Close window gaps with metal flashing.
- Put screens on vents, especially on lower floors.



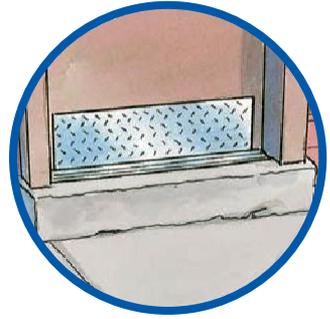
## Fill Large Gaps and Holes

**The way to close large gaps and holes depends on the building material and amount of space behind the hole.**

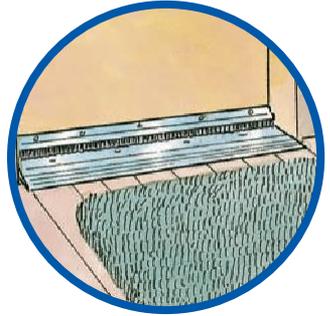
- Use mortar or ready-mix cement to fill gaps and holes in cement and stone foundations. Cover large holes with metal lathe or screening, then seal with mortar or cement.
  - This lathe can also be placed along the bottom of fences or porches and extended approximately 18 inches into the soil to prevent rodent burrowing.
- Cover floor drains and vents with heavy-duty metal screening, secured with masonry nails or cement.



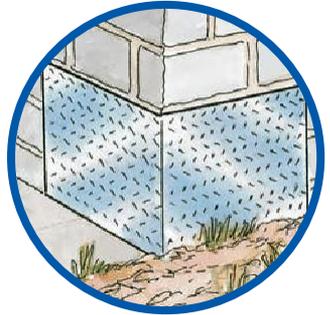
- Install sheet metal kick plates on the lower exterior of doors where rats have been gnawing or entering the building. Install metal thresholds underneath.



- Use door sweeps to keep gaps under doors smaller than a quarter inch.



- Consider installing heavy gauge sheet metal between foundations and the ground.



- Seal pipes leading into walls with escutcheon plates ("pipe collars"). Check pipes regularly for leaks.



## Close Inactive Burrows

An inactive burrow will often have leaves, cobwebs or other debris around the entrance. These burrows should be closed so rats can't get back in.



- Close burrows in soil by filling with soil and tamping down with a shovel, or by stepping on them.



- Close burrows in cracked or broken sidewalks with metal filler and cement.



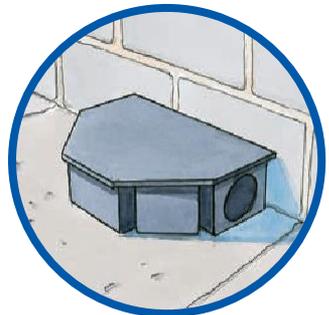
## Step Five: Wipe Them Out

### Rodent Baiting

Rodent bait is an effective way to wipe out rats. But applying these poisons is a job for professionals. They will only work while causing minimal harm to people or other animals if used properly, so it's always better to hire someone with formal training whenever possible. And remember that lethal extermination is only one part of the solution! Follow all of the other tips in this guide to be sure that rats stay out for good.

**Make sure your pest control company follows these guidelines:**

- Always read and follow the manufacturer's label, and use the smallest effective amount of bait. Be sure that you also have a copy of the label on hand.
- Use disposable gloves when handling bait and wash your hands afterwards.
- Use secured bait chunks (called bait "blocks") inside tamper-resistant bait stations. Secure or anchor bait stations to the ground or fence with cement, caulk or wire.
- Place bait stations on the same path as rats normally travel – often along building walls and fence lines. Since rats always travel on the same path, they're more likely to eat from stations along it.
- Use a funnel to place loose pellet bait into burrows. This will help ensure pellets are placed deep into the burrow, so rats can't push them out.
- Bagged bait should not be used in burrows or bait stations. Rats can push or carry them out of burrows or stations, where children, pets or wildlife can get to them.



- Store and place bait stations where children and pets can't get to them.
- Never use a product that doesn't have a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Registration Number.
- Replace bait after it's been eaten. Leave bait stations and bait in place for at least two weeks after all rat activity has stopped. Monitor on a monthly basis.
- Never use illegal bait products.



**For more information about pesticides, call the National Pesticide Information Center at (800) 858-7378.**

## Choosing and Working with a Pest Control Company

Not all pest control companies are well trained in managing rats. To get rid of rats, you must choose the right company, be clear about what you want done and monitor performance.

### How to Find the Right Company

#### Ask Around and Interview Companies

- Ask your neighbors and friends for referrals.
- Look in the phone book and online for “**integrated pest management**” services. These companies are more likely to inspect, monitor and make recommendations and repairs.
- Interview companies. Ask for references, including previous customers.
- Make sure that the technician has a valid Massachusetts Pesticide Applicator License. Keep a copy of the license on hand for the duration of the work on the property. To look up a license, visit <https://www.mass.gov/pesticide-examination-and-licensing>.

### **A good company will...**

- Inspect your property before giving you a price quote.
- Give you a written inspection report, and an action plan.
- Base quotes and extermination plan on inspection findings, providing personalized service.
- Make referrals for structural repair, if required.
- Visit often until the job is done.
- Put bait in tamper-resistant containers.
- Employ qualified, well-trained exterminators.
- Educate you on how to prevent rats.
- Work with you until rats are gone.

### **Work Together**

- Walk around with the pest control professional during each visit, and keep track of work.
- Agree on a service plan and cost.
- Follow-up on referrals and recommendations.

**Are you a property owner?  
Do you live at the property?  
Does it have three or fewer units?**

If you answered **yes** to all of these questions, then you qualify for the City of Lowell's

### **Residential Rodent Control Assistance Program!**

This is a free inspection and baiting program run by the City's Division of Development Services. A City Health Inspector and state licensed exterminator will inspect the property, treat any burrows, and place out bait boxes. They will then return weekly until activity on the property decreases.



## *Myths and Facts About Rats*

**1. Myth:** Rats the size of cats live in Lowell.

**Fact:** Most rats in our area weigh no more than one pound. When a rat is scared, it will fluff up its fur and look bigger, to scare away its enemies.

**2. Myth:** “Rat cities” are in our sewers.

**Fact:** Only small pockets of rats live in sewers. Most rats live in burrows at ground or basement level.

**3. Myth:** City rats are “immune” to poison.

**Fact:** Today’s poisons work fine – but only if rats eat them. When garbage is easily accessible, rats don’t take the bait.

**4. Myth:** More than one kind of rat lives in Lowell. **Fact:** Only the Norway rat lives here. It varies in color and size, depending on how old it is and where it lives. As a result, people call it different names (city rat, brown rat, sewer rat, wharf rat, river rat, alley rat, house rat). It’s all one species.

**5. Myth:** Cats, dogs, hawks and other animals help control city rats.

**Fact:** They may kill an occasional rat, but they can’t keep up with rats’ rapid breeding rates. **Only people can make a difference!**

For more information:  
[www.lowellma.gov/1689/](http://www.lowellma.gov/1689/)  
Rodent-Control

To report rat activity  
email  
[rodents@lowellma.gov](mailto:rodents@lowellma.gov)  
or call 978-674-4144