

Rats and Mice Are Making Their Move!

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

Contrary to the old farmer's tale, mice and rats trying to get into your home are not a sign of a bad winter coming. It is, however, a sign that they had a good reproductive season and the population is probably at a peak in their regular population cycle. While critters of many kinds do have a way to sense short term weather changes, they are quite inefficient at prognosticating long term weather trends!

October and November is the time of year that mice and rats are busy trying to get themselves well located for the winter. When I say rats, I am not talking about that nasty Norway rat that is only associated with human structures, I'm talking primarily about the eastern woodrat, more commonly known as the pack rat. With mice you may be dealing with the non-native but ubiquitous house mouse, or one of the nearly half dozen native mice such as the plains or western harvest mouse or the totally adorable (no, seriously, they are) deer mouse or white footed mouse. Well, they're adorable until they are trying to move into your house for the winter!

In reality, the native mice are rarely a problem in homes. They may be found in out buildings but most of the time they are residing outside of structures. The house mouse, while often spending winters well outside of buildings, will come scurrying back to our structures once the chilly winds of autumn start to blow!

The first step to keeping rodents out of your house is not give them a way in! Caulk up any cracks in foundations, gaps around utility entrances, even poor fitting doors, including garage doors, can allow entrance. Figure that if you can get the start of your little finger into a gap, a mouse can go through it! This is also a great way to keep insects and chilly drafts out of your house!

Pack rats are a special nuisance and can be very destructive. They are well known to get under the hoods of parked cars and start packing nesting material in on the engine or chewing up and removing wiring. In the case of pack rats, leaving hoods up on cars will help discourage them or leaving a lightbulb shining into the engine compartment overnight can be a discouragement to the little rascals. Rat traps or live catch traps can also be used. You may want to use several traps baiting some with peanut butter and some with nice shiny aluminum foil.

There are numerous mouse and rat baits that are effective but make sure that they are nowhere that pets or children can access them. Larger block baits that can be secured are often better for pack rats as the smaller sized grain based baits are often just hauled away and stashed by pack rats. Mouse traps are often best set side by side up against a wall with the trigger facing the wall.

Do not waste money on ultrasound devices that are supposed to repel insects, rodents, etc. Time and time again they have been shown to be ineffective. You will also often hear or read about all sorts of non-traditional baits or poisons. While many folks will swear by these, they are often illegal and dangerous. Using any kind of liquid that is not labeled for rodent control as a rodent control bait, can get you in trouble.

Ultimately, after a few busy weeks now, the rodent activity will calm down. As we get deeper into fall and closer to winter, the critters will have established their new home bases and if we can survive the onslaught of the next few weeks, we should be in good shape for the rest of the winter!