

## Dealing with Autumn Rodents

### AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

As we move into fall and the slowly, or not so slowly, falling temperatures, not only do we get to deal with 6 and 8 legged invaders to our homes and buildings, but also some 4 legged types: rodents! While we can spray for the 6 and 8 legged invaders, we can't spray for the 4-legged ones and we have to take some different tactics.

The good thing is that anything that we do to seal the structure against insects, also helps to reduce the chance of invasion by rats and mice. Obviously rats and mice need bigger openings than crickets and spiders, but the simple act of sealing openings into the house is a good first step. Secondly, don't allow excessive plant growth to occur around your house. This simply provides hiding places for rodents as they try to figure out how to get in to your home.

The next step is a very simple but very important one. Always keep doors closed. It can be an easy thing to leave the door from the kitchen to the garage open while you carry in bags of groceries. But this 30 or 60 or 90 second window of opportunity is all that is needed to let all sorts of critters into your home. Make no mistake, these rascals are fast and once they are in your house they will disappear in a heartbeat to who knows what little hiding places they can find.

There's no less than a half dozen species of mice or mice like critters that will find their way into your house. While many people use poison baits for control I'm not a big fan of this as mice can go outside to ultimately die where predators can find them, eat them and then become sick from secondary poisoning. Additionally, there's no poison that will keep the mouse from stinking if it dies in your home.

With a trap, you've got it, you know you've got it and you can dispose of it! Traps are very effective when properly set. There's all sorts of "better" mousetraps out there but I like the good old standby snap trap, easy and effective. Place them with the trigger against the wall, even two side by side to improve effectiveness. I frequently bait mousetraps with peanut butter, the cheaper and oilier the better! I'm not a fan of glue boards or sticky traps though. While they work, you then have a live mouse you have to deal with.

The disgusting Norway rat, the big rat with a naked tail that is often the culprit of "rat infested tenement buildings" is not normally found around homes. It is more likely to be seen in large commercial structures. We do have two native rats, the hispid cotton rat and the eastern woodrat, the latter is better known as the pack rat. Cotton rats are not likely to enter into homes as they feel far more at home in grasslands, field edges and the edges of timbered areas.

The woodrat builds huge stick nests, outside of homes and are a big problem because they love to collect manmade items to store in their nest. They are often attracted to one particular color or one type of object and they can become just a little bit obsessive going after those items. The biggest issue is that they like to get up inside engine compartments of vehicles and start biting off wires to haul back to the nest. The damage that they cause can run into the thousands of dollars. Baits often aren't effective as they haul it back to the nest but don't eat it. Trapping can work better especially if you've figured out what color they like and then put something that color on the trigger. If you aren't sure, start with baiting some traps with peanut butter and on others wrap the trigger with aluminum foil. You can also leave hoods of cars ajar or put lights in the engine compartment to discourage packrat activity.