

ROOF RATS



Roof Rat Prevention

Manicure your landscape

- Roof rats are not indigenous to Arizona, and therefore try to escape the heat by harboring in thick shrubs where there is moisture and protection; a clean yard is a deterrent.
- Thin out bushes until daylight can be seen through them; oleanders and bougainvilleas are particularly prone to harboring roof rats.
- Prune trees and shrubs up from the ground at least 12 inches so the ground beneath is open and visible.
- Prune back all tree branches from all structures by at least 6 feet.
- Rake dry leaves, old growth and weeds from under trees and shrubbery.
- Thick ground covers should be thinned.
- Keep palm trees trimmed. Roof rats nest in the skirts of old fronds, as well as in piles of debris and hollow trees.
- Take down all vines/shrubs growing against the home or perimeter walls
- Remove wood and brush piles from yard.
- Eliminate piles of lumber and firewood, or store them at least 18 inches above ground and at least 12 inches from walls.

Harvest citrus and other fruit

- Promptly and completely pick all fruit (ripe or not) on citrus and other fruit and nut trees, and pick up fallen fruit every season.
- Fruit and nut trees that touch other trees, houses, fences or power lines have more roof rat activity, so prune to isolate each tree.
- If you can't physically pick your trees, go through the yellow pages for landscapers who might. Those landscapers who will pick – not all do – typically charge between \$15-\$25 per tree.
- Residents can also call their faith community for youth groups who might be looking for community service work or Boy/ Girl/ or Eagle Scouts, as well.
- Consider donating excess fruit to the nearest food bank.
- With proper care, fruit and nut trees do not need to be removed, but you may want to consider this if upkeep is not possible for you.
- Check for the seasonal citrus drop off program (generally from January to March each year). In a partnership between the city, residents and county agencies, this program makes citrus drop off possible, with viable fruit being distributed to food banks and county facilities. Sponsored by the NEIGHBORtoNEIGHBOR Campaign, more information is available by calling (602) 273-0435.

- Short of cutting a nut tree down, there is virtually no way to stop a nut bearing tree from being a roof rat's food source. But the tree will make a good place for a bait station (see section on bait stations and snap traps).

Don't unknowingly feed roof rats

- Roof rats will eat anything to survive – this includes all domestic and wild animal food, garbage, and animal feces.
- Keep all pet feces off the ground at all times.
- Don't leave pet food out, especially overnight.
- Consider not filling bird feeders until all signs of roof rat activity have ended, or provide just the amount of bird seed that will be consumed in a day and sweep up fallen seeds before sunset.
- Store bulk foods and seeds in metal, sealed, rat-proof containers. (Rats will eat through plastic bins.)
- Keep garbage containers tightly covered.

Eliminate standing water

- All water sources on private properties are a welcomed invitation to a roof rat. This can include birdbaths, dog/cat water bowls, fountains, water features, and pools.
- Drain or empty all standing water sources except pools and spas. Draining standing water also helps prevent mosquito breeding issues.
- Change pets' drinking habits by training them to go inside for a drink, if your dog/cat is used to drinking water from a bowl outside.
- Do not leave food or water outside for stray/neighborhood animals.
- Keep pool water level at least 6 inches below the decking surface. If a rat falls in while getting a drink, it won't be able to get out of the pool and can drown. Dead rats can be fished from the pool with a long-handled net and disposed of in city trash containers.

Seal your home and other structures

- The most extensive damage occurs when roof rats enter the home, so the first goal is to keep them out!
- Caulk all holes, cracks, crevasses, or gaps (any opening larger than a nickel) on the exterior walls and underneath the eaves of block and/or wood constructed homes/outbuildings, sheds, etc.
- Look for holes in exterior walls and near hot water heaters, washers, dryers, dishwashers, and under sinks.
- Roof vents and attic turbine ventilators should be checked and screened if necessary.
- Fireplaces need to be protected with the proper screening of a chimney cap.
- Tile or wood shake roofs should be closely inspected for openings.
- Pet doors, vents, and exterior door and window screens should be secured at night.
- Use stucco diamond mesh or steel wool and a flathead screwdriver and push the material into all questionable areas, to screen and seal all holes and air vents leading into the home or shed. It cuts and molds very easily. For aesthetic purposes, you can use paintable caulk to go over the areas containing the steel wool and then paint over the caulk.
- If window or door screens are loose, either reinforce or replace.

- Stuff the cover of the air conditioning line that runs from the outside unit into the attic with steel wool or copper mesh to prevent rats from climbing up the insulated pipe inside the cover. Look for scratch marks on the insulation, and then set a snap trap to catch them the next time they use that entrance.
- Always shut doors when exiting/entering the home.
- NOTE: Screens placed on clothes dryer vents should be checked often and cleaned for accumulated lint. Not cleaning the screen could result in the malfunction of the dryer and/or possibly result in a fire.

What doesn't work

- Rats quickly learn safe travel routes through yards to avoid dogs.
- Cats will kill juvenile rats, but are rarely able to handle an adult roof rat.
- There is no evidence that ultrasonic and electromagnetic devices drive rodents away. However, there is evidence that they can cause hearing loss in pets, especially dogs.
- Maricopa County Vector Control tested Coca Cola (rumor has it that roof rats can't burp and die from drinking it), but found that it didn't work. In fact, the rats loved it.
- Don't use "d-Con" bait; if pets or wild birds nibble on a rat killed with it, they can become sick.

Long term solutions

- Strongly consider xeriscaping the yard. Xeriscape (the use of drought tolerant plant materials and drip irrigation systems) doesn't have to be just gravel and a couple of cactus; there are many lovely options. Extensive information on xeriscape methods and ideas are available from the city's Water Conservation Office at (480) 312-5670.
- Combine xeriscape with a citrus-free yard to create a very effective control against roof rats.
- Maintain a defensive line on your property by continuing the use of bait stations, keeping a clean yard and removing pet food and water dishes at night.

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