

Bird Feeding

Surveys have suggested that almost half the gardens in the UK have bird tables or seed feeders. Estimates suggest in the UK we spend about £150 million each year on bird food.

We support bird feeding which helps our native wild birds, but our pest control team are finding that many of the rat problems we are asked to treat have accidentally be caused by food placed for other wildlife. In a 2015 survey of local councils more than three quarters reported that bird feeding was increasing rat numbers.

If you want to feed the birds in your garden we recommend you follow the detailed guidance produced by the RSPB – which will tell you more about selecting bird food, and placing it correctly. See: <http://www.rspb.org.uk/advice/helpingbirds/feeding/index.aspx>

However, please also consider our guidance to help you reduce the chances of rodents living and feeding close to your home.

About Rats

Rats are natural scavengers, they look for food over a very wide area. Once they find a garden which provides food they will regularly return, and may set up home nearby. When there is a regular food supply rats will multiply.

Therefore we recommend that you.

- **Place food carefully.** Use bird tables and appropriately located bird feeders. Not only is food on the ground easy for rats to take, but birds feeding on the ground are vulnerable to attack by predators.
- **Select the right bird food.** The best type of food changes through the year. During winter high fat foods such as nuts and fat balls are ideal for overwintering birds. In the spring and summer high protein foods such as seed mixes are beneficial to those rearing young.
- **Feed early in the day.** This reduces the chance that food will be left overnight for rats to take. If you have to feed a second time, do so well before dusk.
- **Remove discarded or uneaten food.** Often birds prefer one of the seeds in a mix, and will drop the others. This 'waste' is ideal for rats. If seed is not being eaten select a different brand. If you show pet food suppliers what is not being eaten they may be able to recommend an alternative mix.
- **Clean up regularly.** If possible place your bird table or feeders over a hard surface such as a patio so that you can regularly sweep up any food which is dropped. Dirty tables and feeders can harbour dangerous bacteria and cause an outbreak of disease.
- **Keep your stocks of food safe.** Use a tin, or strong lidded box so that rats are not attracted to food stocks in sheds and garages.

Be on the lookout

We recommend that you **regularly look for signs of rats** – so that if a problem does occur it can be solved quickly before rodent numbers increase.

- Look for new holes in the ground, especially around compost heaps, under sheds or decking.
- Rats leave dark, sausage shaped droppings about 1 - 2cm long.

If you find rats

- Call us – we'll offer further advice and tell you more about the service we can offer
- Remove bird feeders, and stop feeding until the problem has been resolved
- Tell your neighbours, and ask for their cooperation

Further information

Please also see our information sheet: Wildlife Pests and Waste

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