



Pest Prevention Begins at Home

The first cold nights of fall are a signal. Mice and rats that spent the summer perfectly happy outdoors start looking for somewhere warm, dry and close to a meal. Very quickly, Maine Township's townhomes, condos and apartment complexes become a perfect target. The good news is that rodents are picky in a very predictable way, and the steps that make your home a poor choice are cheap, quick and mostly things you can do yourself right now.

Here is what works to keep you and your neighbors healthy, happy and rodent-free!

Why Rodents Pick One House and Skip the Next

Rodents need three things: food, water and a warm place to nest. Take away any one of them and your property stops being worth the trip.

They also need less of an opening than most people imagine. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, a mouse can fit through a hole the width of a pencil — about a quarter inch. Rats need only a little more for their adventure. Once inside, rodents gnaw on wiring and stored food, contaminate surfaces with droppings and urine, and reproduce quickly. A problem caught in October is a nuisance. The same problem in January is a much bigger problem.

The 15-Minute Fall Walk-Around

Once each fall, walk the outside of your home slowly and look low. Check: where siding meets the foundation; around gas, electric, cable and air-conditioning lines; the dryer vent; the bottom and corners of the garage door; basement window wells; crawl space and attic vents; and the soffits.

Bring a flashlight and a can of spray foam and a roll of hardware cloth. Most homes have three or four gaps. Closing them is the single highest-value hour you will spend on pest control all year.

Step One: Cut Off the Food and Water

This is where most rodent problems start, and it is almost always something ordinary.

- **Garbage.** Keep kitchen waste in containers with tight-fitting lids and keep cart lids closed and latched. Never leave bags sitting outside overnight or stacked beside the cart.
- **Bird feeders.** The most overlooked food source in the suburbs. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency recommends stopping outdoor bird feeding entirely while you are dealing with an infestation or switching to husk less seed and cleaning up spillage daily.
- **Pet food.** Store it in a sealed metal or hard plastic container, not the paper bag, and not on the garage floor. Pick up bowls at night rather than leaving food out.
- **Pet waste.** Rodents feed on it. Picking up the yard weekly is pest control, not just housekeeping.

- **Gardens and fruit trees.** Harvest ripe produce and pick up windfall fruit and nuts instead of letting them sit.
- **Compost.** Turn the pile so newly added food scraps are covered, and keep meat, dairy and oils out of it.
- **Grills and outdoor kitchens.** Empty the grease tray and scrape the grates after use.
- **Water.** Fix dripping spigots, clear clogged gutters, and empty standing water in saucers, buckets and wheelbarrows.

Indoors, move pantry staples including flour, rice, cereal and pet treats into airtight containers, wipe up crumbs nightly, and do not leave dishes in the sink overnight.

Step Two: Seal the Gaps

Fill small holes with steel wool and hold it in place with caulk or spray foam. Foam alone will be chewed through — the steel wool is what stops them. For larger openings, use lath screen or metal, hardware cloth, sheet metal or cement.

Outside, check the foundation line all the way around, utility and service line penetrations, dryer and exhaust vents (make sure the damper flap still closes), the garage door sweep and side seals, attic and crawl space vents, gable ends, soffits, eaves, and the frames around doors and basement windows.

Inside, check under sinks and behind the dishwasher, stove, washer and dryer; around water heater and furnace lines; floor drains and floor vents; inside kitchen cabinets and closet floors; the fireplace; and the joint where the basement wall meets the floor.

Step Three: Clear Out the Hiding Places

The EPA specifically identifies leaf piles and deep mulch as rodent nesting sites. A tidy perimeter does a surprising amount of work.

- Rake and remove leaf piles rather than letting them sit against the house through the winter.
- Pull mulch back a few inches from the foundation and keep it shallow.
- Stack firewood off the ground and away from the house — not against the garage or under the deck.
- Trim dense ground cover, ivy and low shrubs back from the foundation.
- Clear stored junk from under decks, porches and sheds, and store garage items on shelves rather than on the floor.
- Keep grass cut and remove unused vehicles, appliances and construction debris.

In unincorporated Maine Township, several of these: tall grass and vegetation, improperly stored refuse and outdoor storage and accessory buildings are also property maintenance code matters the Township enforces. **If a neighboring property is creating conditions you cannot fix from your side of the lot line, Code Enforcement is the right call.**

If You Rent or Live in a Condo or Subdivision

Shared walls change how much you can do yourself. Rodents travel through wall cavities, pipe chases, drop ceilings and utility trenches, which means one unit's problem is quickly the whole building's problem — and one unit's careful housekeeping will not solve it alone.

- **Report it early, and in writing.** An email or text creates a dated record. Include what you saw, where, and when.
- **Know the standard.** Under the Cook County Residential Tenant Landlord Ordinance, which covers most rental units in suburban Cook County, a landlord must provide pest control services within 10 days of being notified and keep written records of those measures for three years.
- **Condos and HOAs. Common areas, trash rooms and exterior walls are the association's responsibility through its management company, not the Township. Put it in front of the board in writing.**
- **Do your part inside your own unit.** Seal the gaps around pipes under your sinks, keep balcony and patio areas clear of food and clutter, never leave trash bags in hallways or on balconies, and close the dumpster lid every time.

If They Are Already Inside

Start with traps. Snap traps placed flush against walls, in the spots where you have found droppings, baited with a small smear of peanut butter, are effective and carry no poisoning risk. Set more than you think you need.

If you use bait products, use them correctly. Under EPA rules, rodenticides sold for home use must come as ready-to-use bait stations with the bait secured inside. loose pellets are not permitted for residential use, and the strongest second-generation anticoagulants — brodifacoum, bromadiolone, difenacoum and difethialone — are not sold for consumer use because of the risk they pose to pets, children and wildlife.

- Place traps and bait stations only where children and pets cannot reach them, and store unused product in a locked cabinet or shed.
- Read and follow the product label. It is the law, and it is also the instructions.
- **Remove and dispose of dead rodents promptly.** A poisoned rodent eaten by a hawk, an owl, a fox or a neighbor's dog passes the poison along.

When you clean up, the CDC advises against sweeping or vacuuming droppings, urine or nesting material, which can push particles into the air. Ventilate the space for 30 minutes first, wear rubber or plastic gloves, spray the area with a household disinfectant or a bleach solution until wet, let it soak five minutes, then wipe it up with paper towels and wash your hands thoroughly.

If you are seeing rodents repeatedly, finding burrows in the yard, or hearing activity inside walls, hire a licensed pest control professional. Ask what exclusion work they will do, not just what they will put down.

Who to Call

Unincorporated Maine Township — property maintenance, refuse storage, tall grass and vegetation

Maine Township Code Enforcement • Nader Ghazaleh • 847-297-2510 •
nghazaleh@mainetown.com

Suburban and unincorporated Cook County — for more information

Cook County Department of Public Health • 708-836-8600 • cookcountypublichealth.org (online rodent and pest complaint form)

Inside Des Plaines, Park Ridge, Niles, Glenview, Morton Grove or Rosemont

Start with your city or village public works or health department, which handles rodent complaints within municipal boundaries.

Garbage service in unincorporated Maine Township

Residents contract directly for refuse removal • Flood Brothers • 630-261-0400

Rodents Do Not Respect Property Lines

This is the part worth saying plainly: a block is only as rodent proof as its least careful property. An uncovered garbage cart, an overflowing bird feeder or a neglected woodpile two doors down will keep the population going no matter how well you seal your own foundation.

So, talk to your neighbors. Bring it up at the block party or the association meeting. If several homes on a street do the same three things in the same month: secure the trash, close the gaps and clear the cover, the results are dramatically better than any single household acting alone.

Prevention costs a Saturday afternoon and a trip to the hardware store. Extermination costs considerably more.

Remember: Pest prevention begins with you, at home!