

# Bad gardening practices attract unwanted guests

A green thumb may ease the food cost crisis but it may also attract unwanted dinner guests—rats.

Residents beginning backyard gardening should be aware of the potential food supply they are making available to rats. Many of the more common vegetables and fruits grown are favorite foods for rats, these include tomatoes, cantaloupe, sunflower (seeds), windfalls from fruit trees and some squash.

Residents can protect themselves from infestation by observing good gardening practices. Proper spacing between rows is important to allow for growth of plants, ease of weeding, and most importantly, spaced and well maintained rows are less attractive to rats. Any signs of rodent activity such as burrows, tracks, or droppings will also be more visible to the gardener when proper spacing is observed.

Staking and pruning plants such as tomatoes will make your garden less attractive to rats and will yield a higher percentage of good fruits. Cultivate as often as necessary to keep weeds under control. Cultivation is preferred to mulching as it provides the gardener a chance to closely scrutinize his garden for signs of rat activity.

Mulching materials such as peat moss, ground corncobs, straw, shav-

ings, and paper commonly provide rat harborage. Black plastic and cardboard, which are frequently being used as mulches, have the highest potential for rat infestation.

Storage sheds also provide harborage for rats. Careful maintenance is required to deter rats as none of these sheds are truly rodent proof.

A secondary food source for rats is provided by improper composting. Vegetable refuse should never be left exposed. Compost materials should be sprinkled with a small amount of fertilizer and lime and covered with a layer of soil. Besides being necessary for efficient decomposition, this procedure will deter even the hungriest of rats.

If rat signs such as droppings, tracks, gnawing and/or burrowing are observed, a safe rodenticide purchased at hardware or grocery stores should be placed in the area of activity. The bait should be replaced as eaten until all rat activity ceases. Burrows may then be filled with soil. If burrows are reopened by the rats, baiting should be resumed.

Lastly, after all fruits and vegetables are harvested, the remaining vegetation should be turned under, not left to rot in the open.

Don't share the fruits of your labors with rats!

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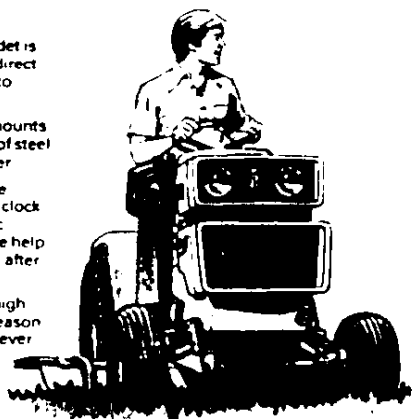
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