

KEEPING OUR FOOD SAFE

A Guide to Rodent Prevention in Community Gardens

Rats can sometimes be an issue in community gardens. Rats need three things to live: food, water, and shelter. A garden that is not well maintained provides all of these elements, making it an attractive setting for rodents to make a home. Rats are known to spread several bacterial and viral diseases so it's important that we reduce their impact on our food supply.

By following the guidelines in this handout, you can actively do your part to prevent a rodent problem in your community garden.

In general, rat problems can be reduced by:

Maintaining compost properly

- Turn and water compost piles regularly to promote active composting.
- Do not leave loose or untended debris piles on your plot. See images for examples of properly secured compost bins.
- If you do not use a composting bin, you can bury your plant debris in your plot at least one foot deep (also known as trench composting)
- Do not compost food scraps from your home at the garden.

Harvesting crops promptly

- Keep a close eye on your garden and harvest produce regularly.
- Don't let produce fall to the ground.

Removing excess foliage that can provide harborage (a place for rats to live)

- Keep your garden plot free of excess foliage or undergrowth. Keep plants pruned and remove weeds regularly.
- Remove or compost dead or dying plants, especially at the end of the season.

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Acceptable and Non-Acceptable Items in Your Community Garden Compost



OK TO COMPOST

- Plant material free of disease or seeds
- Coffee grounds
- Plant stalks chopped into 1"-2" pieces
- Grass clippings
- Clean cardboard
- Clean newspaper

DO NOT COMPOST

- Food scraps from home
- Cooked foods, meats, dairy, eggs, or animal bones



Why can't I compost food scraps in my community garden compost?

Due to the potential for rats in community gardens, rules prohibit plot holders from composting anything that could become a food source for rodents.

Choose your compost container wisely



Photo by oregonmetro.gov

The Earth Machine composter is very popular in Portland gardens. These units are suitable, but the bottom floor should be in place. Rats are very good burrowers and can easily get into unprotected compost piles. Your compost **MUST** be protected from rodents, meaning that your container should have no gap any larger than a dime.



If you choose to build your own compost container, 1/4 inch steel hardware cloth is a durable and economical option to keep rodents out. Remember, it's much easier to prevent a problem than to deal with an existing infestation!



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If you have questions or want more information, contact Community Garden Program staff at 503-823-1612 or email pkcomgard@portlandoregon.gov.