

Keeping our Food Safe

A Guide to Rodent Prevention in Community Gardens

A collaborative effort brought to you by



Multnomah County Environmental Health



**PORTLAND
PARKS & RECREATION**
Healthy Parks, Healthy Portland

Community gardens are an increasingly popular way for Portlanders to grow sustainable, local, fresh produce. Community gardens also provide a unique environment for people of all ages to participate in hands-on learning about growing food- an activity that has parallels in life lessons such as patience, responsibility and the rewards of hard work. Portland Parks & Recreation is responsible for setting guidelines for equitable use of garden space and ensuring that all plot holders can produce safe, healthy foods. An important aspect of a safe garden is effective rodent control.

Rats can occasionally be an issue in community gardens. Rats need three things to live: food, water and shelter. An improperly maintained garden provides all of these elements, making it an attractive environment for rodents to make home. Rats are known to spread several bacterial and viral diseases so it's important that we minimize their impact on our food supply.

Improperly constructed or maintained garden plots are the primary cause of rats in community gardens. In general, rat problems can be minimized by:

- **Properly maintaining compost**
- **Harvesting foods promptly**
- **Eliminating excess foliage that can provide harborage (a place for rats to live)**



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



Choose your compost container wisely

The Earth Machine compost unit is very popular in Portland gardens. These units are suitable, but they should be used with the bottom floor in place. Rats are very good burrowers and can easily get into unprotected compost piles. Your compost **MUST** be protected from rodents, meaning that no gap in your container should be 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!



Acceptable and Non-Acceptable Items in your Community Garden Compost



OK

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



NO



- 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, plot holders are currently prohibited from composting anything that could become a food source for rodents.

Prevent Harborage

- Keep your garden plot free of excess foliage or undergrowth. Keep plants pruned. This will help to eliminate cover for rodents so that they will find your garden less appealing as a home. Reducing rat harborage is a great excuse to clean invasive plants out of your plot!
- Keep a close eye on your garden. Harvest ripe produce promptly. Don't let produce fall to the ground. This will help eliminate food sources for rodents.
- Turn and water compost piles regularly to promote active composting.

If you have questions or would like more information, contact Community Garden Program Staff at (503) 823-1612 or e-mail pkcomgard@portlandoregon.gov.