

We asked readers to share their stories of pest infestation. Here are their responses submitted in March and April 2010.

Edd Johnson, Olympia:

I have a gas BBQ on a covered deck, so I can BBQ all winter.

One cold dark night (last November) I prepared to throw on some burgers so I preheated the grill.

Soon I heard some unusual sounds and could smell burning hair.

Realizing something was very wrong I turned off the gas and started to disassemble the grill.

Below the Lava rock, in the space next to the burners, was a rat's nest on fire and a pregnant rat stuck tight!

As she was burned and in obvious distress I humanely dispatched her with a .17 cal. pellet.

The grill has been steamed cleaned and all the openings sealed with screen. I still think of her when my steak sizzles.

Randy Lind, Lind Pest Control & Inspection Services, Inc.:

As a local pest control business owner (Lind Pest Control & Inspection Services, Inc.) with 20 years of experience, I would like to offer your readers a word of caution regarding the use of poisonous rodent baits. I have seen

family pets get very sick, and be near death, due to homeowners, carelessly or ignorantly, dispersing these products within reach.

Furthermore, some of the most difficult rodent treatments, my company has performed, are ones that we have come behind homeowners that have tried to exterminate rodents on their own by using poisonous bait. Often times rodents will die in their nesting sites within insulated attics, sub-structure crawl spaces, or wall voids, leaving the difficult task of locating and removing the carcasses.

This is contrary to the packaging claims that rodents will go outside seeking water or will “leave the area to die” after consuming the bait. The fact is, after feeding on poisonous baits, rodents become extremely “sluggish” as they hemorrhage internally and bleed to death. This commonly results in the rodent dying in their nesting site and leaving the unpleasant task of locating and retrieval. The odor of a dead rodent can last for a month or two or longer and can be quite unbearable. Not to mention the problem with flies and maggots that will ensue.

P.S. I am a regular contributor to your newspaper in the “Ask A Professional” section. I have written an ongoing story in the months of Nov. '08, Dec.'08, and Jan'09 regarding an experience with a rat. If you are interested, perhaps you can research it or contact me and I would be happy to print it out for you.

Wayne Boudreau II, general manager at Sentinel Pest Control, Inc., Tacoma:

I have seen my share of horrific rodent infestations, but one in particular comes to mind.

We received a phone call two winters ago from a condo owner claiming that she saw a rat in her kitchen. When I went out to her home it was immediately obvious why she had a rat infestation. Her yard was overgrown with weeds, trees and bushes covered her siding and roof line and her yard was full of trash. All of these conditions are conducive to a rodent infestation as they provide both food and harborage for rats.

When she opened her front door to greet me, an awful (sick to my stomach) smell came from the interior of the home. Trash, rotting food and clutter was EVERYWHERE. There were literally trails that one had to use to get around on the inside of the home. As she led me through the home toward the kitchen area, I saw a rat jump from one pile of boxes to another and heard several more scurry around amongst the garbage. In the pest management industry it isn't very often that we see an infestation of this magnitude. Again, the conditions on the interior of this home provided food and harborage for the rats and mice alike.

A rodent infestation can cause numerous problems to a home and to the occupants of a home. In this particular case, rats had contaminated food items, completely soiled the attic insulation and chewed through multiple wires in the attic. For this reason rodents are the number one cause of electrical fires in homes and other structures. In

addition, rats are carriers of many different diseases.

It took a lot of effort, but we were finally able to gain control of the rodent infestation at this home. We first addressed the sanitation and clutter issues throughout her home, yard and attic. The attic insulation was removed and replaced, the yard was cleaned, the bushes and trees were trimmed away from the home and she hired a professional cleaning team to come muck out her home.

Following these initial steps, we were able to locate the rodent access points into the home and repair them. After repairing the entry points, we used snap traps and glue boards to catch the remaining rats. We continue to monitor the traps, and have also placed bait stations on the exterior of the home to help reduce the overall rodent population in the immediate area.

I've seen many rodent infestations, but this is by far the most extreme!!

Tahirah Hendricks, Tacoma:

I live in a Tacoma apartment complex. Although I pay over \$1000 per month, I chose this complex because I like the neighborhood, I am only a few minutes from shopping, and restaurants, and minus the pile of yard waste (which I was told would be gone soon) it has a great view.

Despite numerous complaints, the rat problem at our complex is terrible. I believe the main source is the large pile of yard waste in an open area next to the complex.

They are also burrowing holes in the hillside next to one of the dumpsters. This dumpster has been deemed "Rat Dumpster" and we wouldn't dare to go near it after sun down. Once there was an injured rat hobbling across the parking lot and one of the neighbors wanted to help the "poor kitty". She soon realized it was not a cat at all.

There is a pond close to the pile of yard waste; the children sometimes go down to see the "otter". Of course the adults know it's better known as a rat. I enjoy relaxing outside and chose a bottom floor unit so that my granddaughter and I would have a little more space. Sometimes we see them scurrying and playing right outside our sliding glass door! I have even had to shovel a dead one and I'm nervous about letting my granddaughter plays on the grass were they may have left feces.

Update: We got a new manager who just started a month ago and has been working consistently on our many problems.

Al Conover, Steilacoom:

I have experienced rats trying to establish their residence under my house. They are ingenious and can squeeze through the tightest of places. Both rats and mice have an articulating bone structure and can get through crevices or holes as small as 1/2 inch for rats and smaller for mice. They try to set up house out of the elements and near a food source such as bird feeders.

The screened vents to crawl spaces under many homes are a prime example of how they can penetrate one's home. It's remarkable how persistent they are by forcing

the edges of the screen until they gain the slightest opening. If they get in, they will build nests in the insulation, mate, and then scurry in and out seeking food for themselves and their young.

An outside bird feeder hanging in that backyard tree is an excellent source for them. They normally go out at night when all is quiet to seek sustenance, although if an area is quiet and undisturbed by humans or pets, they'll also feed in the day, especially around dawn or dusk.

A food supply is their first attraction and if available, they will work to build their nests close by. The birdseed that gets tossed to the ground by picky birds gives them the first clue and soon they're up the tree and chowing down on the bird's food at the feeder. People will think that the visiting birds consume a lot of seed not realizing that they are also feeding a rat population.

Unfortunately, I've had to quit using a bird feeder and now only toss them a capful of seed in the morning and hope the ground feeding birds like, Stellar Jays, Crowned Sparrows, Dark-Eyed Juncos will clean it all up before nightfall.

If there is any question about whether one is attracting rats at their feeders, check it at dawn or dusk when quiet or do as I did by shining a flashlight on the feeder at night to find the shocking activity and their eyes aglow as they filled their jowls with the birdseed. When I first discovered the rats on my feeder, there were about six or eight scurrying up and down the tree and over the branches to access the food. Just like all forms of life, it's all about the food!

Anonymous, Olympia:

I live on Olympia's west side. One of our neighborhood homes is a rental with an old dilapidated garage. The garage has old mattresses, cardboard and other things rats like to nest in. The garage has holes in the walls and roof so rats can get in and out. We have asked the owner (who lives in Seattle) to have the garage emptied. But she does nothing.

This last year we noticed that we now have two types of rats at our bird feeders and gnawing at the plastic compost container. Both brown and black rats. In the winter they sometimes manage to get into our house (an old house with "balloon" construction. So they can get into the walls and attic. I trapped several this winter using spring traps with peanut butter on them. I am about to call the health department for advice.

Kay Miles, Tacoma:

Your call for stories about critter infestation caused me to interrupt the eating of my oatmeal to write to you! It's been two years, but the memory of it is vivid with each sighting of a neighborhood squirrel.

For months I'd been hearing scratching and scraping noises from our attic and had hoped they were just birds on the roof. Upon further investigation, I found that there were squirrels in the attic. I became quite good at trapping and releasing these cute critters. They don't like

to be trapped and have quite a vocabulary and bowel release habits. The squirrels (12 in all) got re-homed all over Pierce County - many miles away across a long bridge, in neighboring cities, and on a college campus. Unfortunately, ... [new squirrels moved in to replace the absent squirrels.](#)

However, I soon realized that I would be trapping and releasing squirrels as a life-long hobby if I didn't get professional help. That was expensive. And effective.

... [Critter Control of Seattle helped me and I would recommend them. I also hired an electrician- Daines Electrical to repair the wiring that got chewed in the attic. I would highly recommend them.](#)

... [Critter Control set up a humane trap on my roof to catch the squirrels. They euthanize the squirrels that they catch. Then once all of the animals had been removed from the attic via the roof trap, Critter Control looked for and found the entry hole into the attic. The entry hole was a gap along my roof-line - a very small hole. Critter Control blocked this hole so no more critters could come inside.](#)

... [We no longer have squirrels inside the house. But I get concerned each time I see a fluffy tail in the yard. I wonder where its home is and hope it is outside.](#)

Corie Jones, Olympia:

I live in Olympia, near Black Lake. It is a rural setting, and since we are near water, we are a prime habitat for all

sorts of critters. While cleaning out my garage last July, I noticed a lot of mice, so I put out some deCon. To my HORROR two days later, a very large, very dead rat was lying on the garage floor.

I called a local pest control service and they discovered I had many rats under the house because raccoons had torn away the screens over the foundation vents. The insulation had been torn away as well. My uncle and a cousin went under the house, repaired the screens and the insulation. The pest company smeared coyote scent around the outside of the house to repel further rodents. Hah.

The next day a very large porcupine came sniffing around the house, but I saw no more evidence of rodents until one field mouse got into my car. A trap easily dispatched him, though.

Then, after returning home after Thanksgiving weekend, my dog was whining in front of a small bench -- he does this when a ball has rolled under it and he can't reach it. So, I went over and lifted the bench and out ran a large rat. I called a different pest service (Venable) and they did an inspection of the house.

There was again evidence of rats under the house, possibly getting there by burrowing, and one foundation screen had been popped out. So they replaced all the screens with heavy duty hardware cloth (screening) and also covered the vent holes in the roof soffets. But he also found a small nest behind a bookcase in the living room. Since then the rat moved around from living room to family room to a bedroom and back to the living room.

Long story short, the pest service has been coming to the house several times a month setting traps. One was temporarily caught in a glue board, but pulled itself off. We have named him Willard. He has so far avoided all traps. There is rat feces all around the outside of the living room edges and I have been told to let a professional cleaning company take care of it because they have the right equipment. But they won't come until the rat is gone :(

A smaller rat was caught in a trap, and there is now more evidence of one in a closet in the guest bedroom. Traps have been set there and in my family room by another bookcase because there is a nest there too. The RatMan routinely removes 3-5 rats each visit from under the house. He has placed pet-proof bait stations outside the house on the property to try to cut down on the population headed for the invisible "Rats! Come On In" sign I seem to have on my house.

My dogs have made friends with Willard.

Last Saturday, I was getting ready to go out, and suddenly Willard appeared from under a chair and made a beeline for the dog's food dish. I have been very very careful that no food is left out anywhere and I wipe down my counters and the floors each night with a bleach solution. But I was HOME and so the dog food was supposed to be ok while I was sitting there.

I stamped my foot and yelled at Willard, and he scurried back under the chair. But he immediately came out again and grabbed a piece of dog food. I stamped again and he disappeared long enough so I could grab the bowl and throw it in the garbage. I picked up the phone and called

the pest service, when suddenly Willard is up on the water bowl, drinking.

I called for the dogs and they just walked right by him to come up to me. I stomped my foot again and Willard just sneered at me, until the dogs turned around, then he ran into the laundry room. I put deCon in there and closed the door and I think some of it has been touched but there has been no body... LOL.... I finally removed it so the dogs couldn't eat it.

I cannot tell you how horrible this is. I was assured by the pest company that this does not reflect on my housekeeping abilities. Apparently the East side of Black Lake is having an even worse problem with them. I have another appointment with the pest company and we are going to sit down to make a new plan of action. I even had a friend bring over her mouser cat to stay overnight, but all it did was upset the dogs. It didn't catch anything.

... I will have to replace all my carpets and I have lost some papers from being chewed up by Willard for his nest. Meanwhile...the food is gone off the traps and Willard is still at large.

We cannot find ANY means by which they are getting in. Venable has been WONDERFUL. They are very sympathetic, and Brett the RatMan has been working SO hard to get rid of these things. They send him out every time I call. And they didn't laugh at me when I shrieked when I saw Willard on the water bowl. I was on the phone with them at the time. lol.

Update: I couldn't stand it anymore, and a dear friend from work came over this afternoon and helped me move

everything but furniture out of my living room and I vacuumed up all the droppings. I am willing to sacrifice a vacuum cleaner (that may have to be thrown out) to get rid of this totally gross and dangerous mess. There was no sign of Willard or anything else and I will be able to tell if he goes back in there because the carpet is clear.

Tomorrow I will remove the other trap here in the family room because it has remained untouched for 2 weeks since it has been set up. I am trying to gather my courage to go into the laundry room and move a box of canned goods and a pile of clothes that were waiting to be washed, to see if Willard has set up house or if his cold, ugly stiff body is behind the washing machine because of the deCon..

I have to keep a sense of humor about this or else I would go nuts!!

Mildred Kavanaugh, Lacey:

Last winter (2008-09) mice or rats chewed the hoses and some of the wiring of both my car and my husband's truck while our vehicles were parked in the garage. Repair bills for the two vehicles totaled over \$600.

The mechanic said another customer had most of the wiring in his car destroyed by rodents, a very expensive ordeal for that owner. But, luckily insurance paid part of his bill. Someone else told me that rodents practically destroyed a motorcycle while parked outside last winter.

This year, as part of my preparation for cold weather, I bought an electronic device for the garage that supposedly emits a piercing noise unheard by humans, but intolerable to rodents. I also purchased a product, harmless to people and pets, called Critter Out that repels rats and mice. I sprayed this around the car and truck. I used another product advertised as safe for humans and pets called Critter Repellent that I sprinkled around openings near the garage door. This product has an odor critters do not like, but goes unnoticed by people. I put good ole Decon under the kitchen sink and so far, I have not seen any evidence that we have been “invaded” this year.

Pesky critters like mice and rats are more than just messy and nasty, they can be expensive visitors.

... I don't know if the electronic device worked or not because I began using it at the same time I used the spray and granules that I wrote about. The device is a Riddex that I ordered online. I was so freaked out about our vehicle damage that I decided that just in case one solution didn't work, I would use several products at the same time. The electronic device cost about \$40.00. I have a feeling that the rodent liquid repellent and the granules probably were most effective, but this is a gut feeling.

Chuck Kleeberg, Tacoma:

I have great rat stories, coming from my public health days, but this one is my favorite. I have great rat stories,

coming from my public health days, but this one is my favorite.

My first office as chief of environmental health was in the Public Safety Building in Seattle. The Seattle police headquarters took up all but 2 floors in the building. My office was on the top ... the 15th floor.

They needed space. There was some debate, but seeing how they had guns and we had meat thermometers, we moved a couple of blocks away, down to the Smith Tower.

We hand carried our personal stuff, but hired movers to schlep all our furniture and files down over the weekend. When we arrived to work on Monday morning, there was a box in my office marked "Live Rat". Inside was a hungry live rat in one of the wire live traps we had because we trained and licensed pest control operators.

We called the moving company and they said they had found the rat running around the office and thought it was ours.

This thing had lived with us for some time as they found a very comfy area behind a snack machine littered with snack food bags.

The Central District office wanted him. They named him Winston as an homage to the protagonist in the book "1984" who was morbidly afraid of rats.

The species *rattus rattus* (dba sewer rat), it turns out, are instantly domesticated upon receiving their first meal in captivity. You feed one, you own one. Winston led a good life, going berserk every time someone made popcorn, his favorite food. He frequently escaped his cage, but only wandered around begging for food at each desk.

When he died a few years later, we had him stuffed. He was used in training classes. My wife borrowed him to use as a pointer in a class she taught.

There are a lot of undesirable things in our lives. But a little compassion and a lot of popcorn can make a bad situation better.

....

I have lots of rat tales, but it is a very unpleasant subject to me. As it is to most people. I don't know why we have such a visceral reaction to them.

Seattle offered a bounty on rats for nearly 20 years (1907-1927 as I recall) worried about a bubonic plague that never came. (They never even found a contaminated flea.)

When I was with Health there, we got 1-2 complaints a year about someone being nuzzled while sitting on the toilet. Jane Noland, a Seattle councilmember once said, "That would change your life."

Yes, it would.

Marci Spear, Puyallup:

Where I live there are always LOTS of rats.

My home borders on a highway & has a farm in front & directly behind it. I also have neighbors that feed heavily the wild birds. Imagine having a troop of 6 young rats running across your deck in the afternoon, or having just cooked dinner & having a rat come up to the sliding door and peer into the window. Yes, I have had problems with rats.

The trick seemed to be how to keep them from moving under my home – or dying there.

For years I have dealt with this problem. Last year was the worse.

Had to forgo having Thanksgiving dinner at my house because the stench from under the entire house was too awful. Repeat again around Easter.

Not wanting to break the budget or start a feud with the neighbors.

My tactics and results are different this year with much better results.

I was told by the health department that it didn't do much good to sprinkle around the poison. The rats just haul it off as fast as you put it out & there is no guarantee they will eat it. So, I buy the blocks that are pre-drilled & string them on a piece of bailing wire. That gets hung inside a tree right off the deck. The birds & squirrels know not to touch it - but I can sit here & watch the rats chew away. I always buy at least two - three different types (color, shape & formulation). I would hate for one not to want to belly up to the bar.

I also take a heavy metal bar & again string the poison on the bailing wire & wrap it around the bar. This is placed along the inside of the crawlspace door. As I replace the door I also screw in a strip (the widest - 12" I can find) of roofing mesh. Cut about 3" wider than each side of the door. I saw this trick on a show called the Verminators. It's important to know your enemy. That poison goes out late summer & is replaced again in the spring.

This show also used a trap called T REX. That is available on the internet but there is also a comparable type made & sold by Tomcat. I don't bother with the little feed trays. (too far forward) I keep a small jar of peanut butter with a

plastic knife and spread it on the back of the traps snap plate. I don't want them to trip it & not get caught.

These traps have been really helpful & you can use them over & over. They are not for the squeamish however & if you have a dog or small children you have to be very careful where they are placed. You also need to have them where you can keep check on them as they will sometime just snap shut – they don't work well that way & the rats can get to the peanut butter then. Dining uninvited at my house must have consequences.

This year there has been little action under my house & no smell. Lots of dead rats! Can't say what's going on at the neighbors except the flock of pigeons on the telephone wires across from their house just gets bigger & bigger.

Dave:

I have 5 mice that live in the bedroom of my duplex. My landlord knows and doesn't care that they are there. On and off throughout the night they feed, play and dull their teeth on various items. Sometimes they wake me up with their noises. They are my pets and I love them! Rodents make great pets. Wild animals however, do not. Shortly after my father(a few years ago) passed away, my mother traded her Lexus in for a new one. About a month of owning the car and it was running bad. My sister followed her to the dealership where it died in the parking lot. Wild rats had chewed the wiring and caused \$1000 in damage to her new car. Not fun...Please make sure you have your rodent facts straight

Debby Harrison, Fircrest:

I have had an ongoing battle with Raccoons for over 3 years!! I began my retirement by re-landscaping my yard. I had the most gorgeous sod laid.....not for long! I was attacked by hungry raccoons, who literally, rolled up the yard (like a jelly roll) !!!

... The racoons would roll up the sod to get to the "grubs" (some kind of insect or bug they liked) which was under the sod.

... I had to hire a gentleman recommended by the humane society.... He trapped 6. ... He charged \$50.00 for each "coon". He took them way far away (he said out by Graham) where he lived. ... They're awfully cute. Had a large one in the trap for Thanksgiving that year. The guests loved it. He baited the trap with marshmallows (they like sweets). Now I'm just SICK OF 'EM. We live in Fircrest. They wander the streets. ...

They left for awhile, my lawn took hold....then....they're BACK!!! They use my fence as an outhouse (yes, it's #2) ...not a pretty sight !!!! What a time I've had. HELP.

Joe and Kathleen Oliver, Parkland:

We live in a mobile home and have never had this problem before. We are being invaded by flies. Dozens of them! We don't know how or where they are getting into our

living quarters. We called a pest control company and a man came out and crawled under our house. He said we needed to have it cleaned under the house. He found a dead rat and thinks possibly there is an opossum dead under there because we smell a bad odor in our house.

I have been very busy killing flies. If I don't kill them they die by themselves behind my drapes. We have put in a request with the "Need-a-Break" Service to have them clean for us as we got an estimate from the pest control company for \$1,100.00. That is a little much for us and my husband is too old to crawl under the house. So, that's our story! I am really sick of this and will be glad when they are gone.

Mary Bensman, Tacoma:

I moved into a cute, little green house on Starr St. in Old Town in March of 2009.

Everything seemed fine, although I saw suspicious motion that could have been a rodent in the corners of the bedroom I used for storage from time to time. As soon as the weather turned cold last fall, I began to find mouse turds under the kitchen sink and in the bottom drawer of the oven. There were also mouse turds in some of the lower cupboards.

I let the landlord know immediately and he sent a handyman with a couple of mousetraps. I removed one dead mouse, but they must have learned well. The invasion continued but no more mice were trapped.

The baking sheets I had stored in the stove drawer were thick with mouse turds. I put the dog's food in heavy plastic containers because the mice had gnawed through the packaging. In addition, a friend who frequently parked his car on the street outside the house began to have car trouble. His mechanic checked the engine and told him that some wires had been chewed by rodents.

I called the landlord again threatened to call an exterminator if the problem was not resolved. They sent the handyman with more traps. He stuffed some material in holes in the house exterior under the sink.

A few days after, in mid-December, I was sitting on the toilet and a mouse ran across my bare feet. Another ran into the corner of the bathroom.

That was it for me. I moved out even though my lease wasn't up until March. I paid through the end of lease, cleaned the house thoroughly (finding a lot of mouse poop under the appliances in the kitchen, etc.). The landlord has refused to return my damage deposit of \$1000 accusing my little 13 lb. dog of stinking the place up. I say it's the mouse colony under the floor. What do you think?

Terry Whitworth, owner of Whitworth Pest Solutions,
Puyallup:

I have lived in the Tacoma area since 1975 and I've been involved with the pest control industry the whole time. I have owned Whitworth Pest Solutions since the early

1980's and have seen rodent problems evolve from minor to major since I've been here. I've lived on 6 acres in the Summit area since 1982. When we first moved here, we maintained bird feeders and left pet food outdoors and had few rodent problems. Now rats are so abundant I have given up feeding birds and I use my company to service numerous bait stations on a monthly basis on my property. Some months all the bait in stations has been consumed (we use special tamper resistant stations that only rodents can enter).

We have 2 species of rats here, the Norway and roof rat. The Norway population seems somewhat stable, but the growth in the roof rat population seems to be causing most of the problem. It's unclear what has caused this population explosion, but it has paralleled the growth in eastern gray squirrel populations. People who feed squirrels are also feeding rats, often without realizing it. A single person in the neighborhood who feeds wildlife can cause major rat (and squirrel) problems for neighbors.

Many homeowners cause their rodent problems and don't realize it. The biggest problem is leaving food where rodents can get to it. If you can't place things like pet and livestock food in a rodent proof room, you should put it in something like a metal garbage can (rodents will chew through a plastic one).

All homes should be rodent proofed so rats can't get under the home, into the garage or attic. Once they are inside, they can travel inside walls and get anywhere. A big mistake, often made by homeowners, is using rodent baits inside their home. The problem is, eventually they'll get a dead rat in a wall and have a serious odor problem

(it's a myth that they always go outdoors after they eat bait). The only rodent control I'd consider doing indoors is trapping. Bait can be very effective outdoors if it is placed in tamper resistant bait stations which keeps out pets, children and non target wildlife.

Being in the business I've had many encounters with live rats, usually under houses in crawl spaces, but also inside homes. It is disconcerting to face off with a rat while you are lying on your stomach 50 feet from the entrance to the crawl space.

My most disturbing encounter was when I was a 13 year old kid on a farm in Missouri. My dog and I had cornered a rat in the barn and tried to kill it. As we approached it, it panicked and ran right at me, but instead of running past me it ran up my pants leg. It got to just above my knee and was clawing at my leg to get higher as I hopped around frantically. Suddenly it reversed itself, ran out and escaped. Normally I would have been frustrated that it got away, but in this case I was very happy to have it anywhere but up my pants leg.

Carole Lyle, Minter Creek on the Key Peninsula:

Now that I have begun putting poison, again, in the crawlspace downstairs, I believe that I have the roof rats under control. I had stopped, hoping that blocking access holes would work, but they just find new ways in. I am going to have to pull some sheet rock down when it warms up, to take a better look down there. I have heard "creatures" galloping, underneath the living room floor, at

night. At one point, there was a strong urine smell, and although it is not bad now, I will need to address this problem when the sheet rock comes down.

I DO NOT put D-Con outside; there are too many other animals that could accidentally be poisoned. I have not perfected my hunting skills with the Havahart trap yet, here, although I know, from previous experience, that smoked salmon skin is excellent bait.

I am pretty sure that the rats are coming from a Farm down the road - the people have told me that they have them, but do not make efforts to control them. I am removing the English Ivy from my property to take away hiding places.

AAA Pest Control, in Kent, had been very helpful when I lived in the area. They also have a poison that will not hurt a predator if it eats a poisoned rat. You really should talk to them. They might even remember me; they were impressed with my rat hunting expertise at that time - tell 'em Carole with the '65 Impala sent you! Also ask them about Lock Boxes (to put the poison into, outside) but I do not recommend them around dogs or squirrels.

Rats are smart, and very cautious. They can be controlled (and a big dog like in the pic helps to tell you where they have been). You can control them without calling a Pest Control company (expensive!!) Tell people to have patience if they choose to start rat control. Do not wash the Havahart trap (keep the scent on it), cover the trap (a cozy hiding place with food), check the trap every day.

DO NOT release the rats elsewhere (it is illegal, and just creates a problem for someone else). The quickest, most humane way to dispose of them is to drown them in a tub large enough to completely submerge the trap in (and DON'T look at their eyes). It is not an easy thing to do, but after seeing 10 plus rats in our back yard at the previous house, I was angry enough to do it (they showed up shortly after the renters-from-hell moved in next door)

Oops, I could ramble on and on about rat hunting (also a great way to bond with your dog). I hope that I have been helpful in some way.

Caryl R. French, Tacoma:

This is a story of RATS and the Mortgage Crisis and Economy.

Oh where to begin....it was a dark and stormy morning late in October, close to all hallows eve. It was around 4:30 in the morning and I had let the dog out to do her morning routine. When I peered out the window I saw her tossing something about in the backyard. When I ran outside in my ratty old blue robe I discovered she had a RAT.

As she dropped the rat, I drug the dog back in the house...just then the rat began to move as if dazed. Not wanting my dog to get it again or have the rat live I was faced with the dilemma of killing it...ugh. There in the dark I found a shovel, raised it high over my head and

pondered what the neighbors would think if they saw me in the dark clubbing something in my backyard. I closed my eyes and let loose with the shovel...thud...oh sick to my stomach, I had to pick it up, and it was rather large, and do something with it.

Oh... what to do with it...there it was on the end of my shovel...bleckkk....I finally decided to toss it in my yard waste bin. Sorry Waste Management. I didn't know what else to do!

Well some months later my dog was going crazy and scratching on the door that housed my sprinkler system. As I swung the door open 2 very large rats fell out on the deck. I'm pretty sure my screams were heard down to the Port of Tacoma (I live in Fife Heights). I discovered all the insulation had been renovated into a nest and was full of rat urine and feces...Oh the smell....I donned my pink rubber gloves, tied a towel around my face and using long handled barbeque tongs I began ripping the insulation out and filled 2 Hefty bags with destroyed insulation. As tears fell I finally admitted defeat and called Whitworth Pest Solutions....but the story continues.

Recently, one sunny afternoon all of the neighborhood was enjoying time outside mowing and gardening when the neighbor dogs' incessant barking began to really grate on people's nerves, I joined the lynch mob heading up the street to see what was going on. Well, the house the dogs were at had been abandoned by our neighbors. Apparently the home had foreclosed, they left late one night and didn't return. They left 4 dogs trapped on their second story deck.

Heartsick my neighbor and I decided to peak behind their fence and see if there was a way we could rescue the dogs from the deck. We pushed open the gate and both of us immediately gasped and stepped back...OMG....There was years of waste dumped in their backyard...bags of garbage, maggots,,,RATS...you name it, completely disgusting, it was piled high against the house to the point the siding is rotting.

It was then that everyone in the neighborhood began to tell their story of rat infestation. We've all been having exterminators come only to find we've been living in our lovely neighborhood with a deep dark secret hidden behind a fenced yard.

We called animal control, we called Waste Management. The owners by the second posting from animal control snuck back in under cover of dark and took their animals. We're still waiting on resolution from Waste Management...so far nothing.

But before we judge this bad neighbor, this really is a sad story of the economy. The neighbor used to be a mortgage rep., lost her job... Eventually they couldn't pay for garbage pickup, then they could no longer afford their mortgage and things just went from bad to worse.

They continued to live in the home for two years without any of us knowing it had been foreclosed and the bank was just letting them live there. Those of us in the neighborhood who still had jobs didn't really pay attention to the house that kept having trucks come and go late at night. They were quietly moving and doing it under the cover of dark to save face. I wonder how many other

neighborhoods have rat problems from the foreclosed homes that are eating up the real estate market.

Rats in Tumwater. Oh, my yes. I live near Yelm Hwy and Henderson.

Last fall I started hearing the chewing after dark. Within a few days it was in two spots. I called a very competent exterminator. He set bait stations inside and out - up on the gutters, in the attic, outside in the garden, etc. The bait disappeared at an alarming rate. He came by every three days to replenish it.

We caught a large pregnant female in the garage attic along with a pile of shells from a Hazelnut tree (we have no such tree on the property). We caught one on the gutter. We found another outside in the garden. He added other unusual bait - licorice as an example. Then one afternoon I happened to arrive home earlier than normal and heard a racket above the closet in my bedroom. I called him and he was over 15 minutes later. He predicted it was caught but alive in a trap. He was right. It was angry and LARGE.

Still, three months later we could not figure out where they getting in from. The noise was driving me nuts and I lived in fear it/they would chew through wires and cause a fire. One evening I nearly ran over a rat dashing across the sidestreet near my home. So, I called a roofer and he found out where they got in within a few minutes. They had chewed threw a section in the roof impossible to see from the ground.

The hole was plugged and the noise stopped. Still the bait stations were being emptied every few days. I left a notice near out neighborhood mail boxes asking neighbors to stop feeding birds with seed and to keep their landscape seeds and bulbs in glass or metal cans only. Today, many months later the noise is gone but the bait stations are still being used by rats - although at a less alarming rate. So, where did they come from? I believe it had to do with the closing of the greenhouses at Briggs Nursery right across the street.