

# Rats and your compost

## Why have I got rats in my compost?

Finding rats in your compost bin often causes great distress to the average composter and is one of the most common causes of abandoning composting altogether. It is often believed that composting attract rats, but this is not entirely true. If there are rats nearby, and a recent study found that you are never more than 9 metres away from a rat at any time, they will simply take advantage of the shelter and food that a compost heap provides.



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## What can I do to deter rats?

- ⇒ Some bins, like the Green Cone and Green Johanna are built with rat-proof bases and an affordable, sturdy base can even be bought for a black 'Dalek' bin on [getcomposting.com](http://getcomposting.com)
- ⇒ Line the base, sides and top of your bin with the type of mesh used by builders to strengthen concrete. Chicken wire is not suitable as the mesh holes need to be less than 1.5cm diameter
- ⇒ Make sure your compost bin has a tightly fitting lid that can be clamped on
- ⇒ Rats are shy creatures and prefer to be undisturbed. Regular use of the compost is likely to cause too much disruption for a rat colony to develop
- ⇒ Rats keep to the edges of gardens to avoid predators, so opt for a more central location
- ⇒ More 'greens' (compost ingredients high in nitrogen like grass/plant clippings and fruit/veg scraps) will not create such a nice dry and cosy nest for rats
- ⇒ Strong-smelling, post-meal leftovers such as meat, fish or dairy products **will** attract rats, but pre-meal vegetable and fruit peelings and garden waste are fine to add to your compost

## Rats and diseases

Weil's Disease is carried by 15-30% of rats and the bacterium, found in rat urine, can affect humans. Rats urinate constantly as they move around a garden, therefore any surface over which they have passed can be contaminated until the urine has dried. Take precautions by washing hands and wearing gloves. Bacteria will not affect your compost or be absorbed by plant tissue, but always wash your vegetables and herbs when bringing them in from the garden to use.

As the UK's leading organic growing charity we encourage and inspire people to grow the organic and sustainable way, working together to protect our natural heritage. Find out more at [www.gardenorganic.org.uk](http://www.gardenorganic.org.uk)