



Rats



Don't let rats put you off composting!

Having a compost bin doesn't necessarily mean you'll have a rat problem. However, if there are rats in the area then it's likely they may pay an occasional visit. Here are some ways you can discourage them.

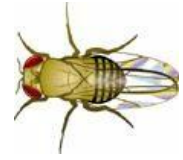
1. **Place a sheet of strong chicken wire or weld mesh under your compost bin.** This will stop burrowing rats getting into the bin. Chicken wire/weld mesh is available from garden centres and DIY shops for around £5 for a 1m² sheet.
2. **Disturb your bin.** Give it a bang or rattle every time you pass it. Rats might not be so keen on hanging around if there is activity around the bin.
3. **Consider locating your bin in an open place in your garden.** Rats dislike crossing open spaces, preferring the shelter provided by walls or fences. Avoid siting the bin next to old sheds or hedges.
4. **Avoid putting cooked food, dairy products, meat/fish or bones in an ordinary compost bin.** There are other units on the market which can safely take cooked food waste. Cooked food can be put in a **wormery** (though not meat, fish or dairy products), a **Green Cone** food waste digester (to be on the safe side you could put a special wire wrap, obtainable from the suppliers, round the basket) or a **Green Johanna** compost bin. If you have a Green Johanna, remember to mix your food waste with garden material or paper/card. A **Kitchen Composter** is a further option: with the help of a bran-based activator called Bokashi, all the food waste added will start to ferment without producing nasty smells, and after about two weeks it can be added to a compost bin or buried in soil.
5. **Keep your compost moist.** Rats prefer dry environments.
6. **Try sprinkling cat pepper or chilli powder around the bin.**

Some facts about rats

- The brown rat, also known as the common rat, is found throughout the country. The smaller ship or black rat mainly inhabits port areas, though is sometimes transported inland with cargo.
- A wild rat lives for around a year. During this time a female will typically breed around 5 to 7 times, producing a litter of between 6 and 12. A rat's gestation period is about 3 weeks.
- Rats are good climbers and swimmers.
- Even when they're not eating, rats need to gnaw on hard material to keep their teeth from overgrowing.



Fruit Flies



You might find tiny flies buzzing around your compost bin when you lift the lid. These are fruit flies which are harmless and very common. They often lay their eggs on fruit before it goes into your bin. They help to break down the waste, but can be a minor nuisance, especially if the bin is near the house. However, there are ways of tackling the problem (points 1 & 4 do not apply to Green Cone food waste digester units):

1. **After adding food waste, cover it with a thin layer of non-food materials such as soil, grass cuttings or cardboard.** This will help to prevent flies being attracted.
2. **Make sure you keep the lid on your kitchen bin/caddy, and try to keep fruit and vegetables covered.** This might help prevent them laying eggs on the food waste.
3. **Leave the compost bin lid off overnight.** This will help to reduce numbers.
4. **Place a couple of sheets of dampened newspaper on top of the food waste you have just added.** Make sure the paper sticks to the inner edges of the bin. Continue doing this throughout the summer months. This can be an especially effective solution where flies are already a problem as it covers them for the duration of their life cycle (which is 7 to 10 days).
5. **Hang a sticky fly trap strip in the bin.** These are often used in greenhouses. Try attaching one to the inside of the lid. Organic pest sprays are fine too, but avoid ordinary chemical fly sprays.



Some facts about fruit flies

- The fruit fly is widely used in laboratories by biologists. This is because it is small and has a simple diet and also its very short lifespan (about two weeks) means that the progress of several generations can be studied in a matter of months.
- Research suggests that fruit flies share 75% of our DNA. Human disease genes can be matched against their fruit fly equivalents, meaning that flies can be very useful models for scientists looking at treatments for a range of disorders.
- The fruit fly is about 3mm long. Its egg is about half a millimetre long. One day after fertilization a worm-like larva emerges. It then goes through a pupal stage before developing into a winged adult.

