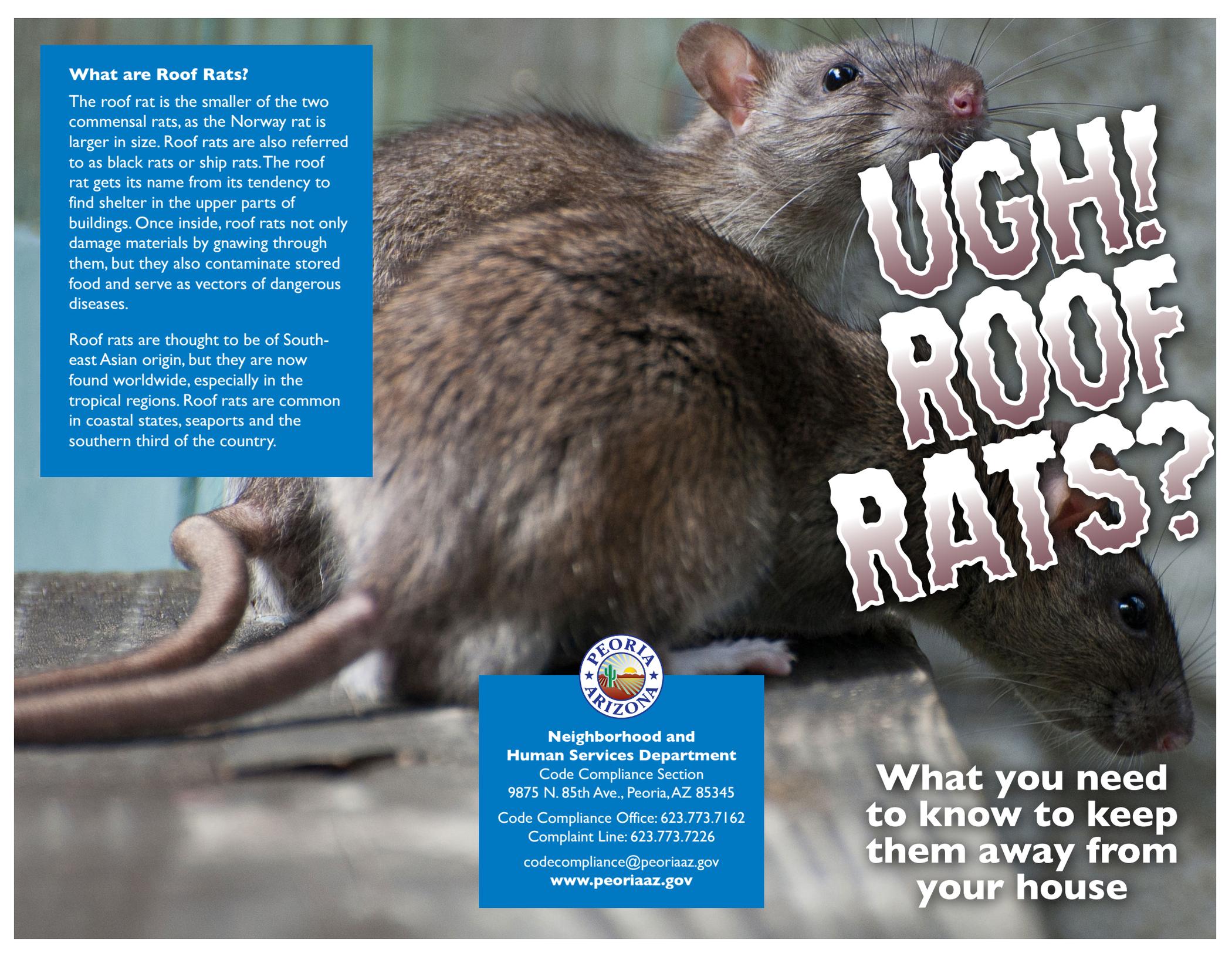


What are Roof Rats?

The roof rat is the smaller of the two commensal rats, as the Norway rat is larger in size. Roof rats are also referred to as black rats or ship rats. The roof rat gets its name from its tendency to find shelter in the upper parts of buildings. Once inside, roof rats not only damage materials by gnawing through them, but they also contaminate stored food and serve as vectors of dangerous diseases.

Roof rats are thought to be of South-east Asian origin, but they are now found worldwide, especially in the tropical regions. Roof rats are common in coastal states, seaports and the southern third of the country.



UGH! ROOF RATS?



Neighborhood and Human Services Department

Code Compliance Section

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What you need to know to keep them away from your house

What are common signs of roof rat activity?

- Sightings on power lines, trees, bushes, patios, etc.
- Hollowed out citrus and other fruit
- Rat droppings
- Noises in the attic and walls
- Gnawing sounds and gnaw marks around roof eaves
- Damage to plastics and coverings on electrical wires
- Unsettled pets

What to do if I see evidence on my property?

Call the Maricopa County Environmental Complaint Line at 602-506-6616. Vector Control officers identify and test rat specimens throughout Maricopa County.

Where have roof rats been found?

Common places where roof rats have been found are in swimming pools, laundry rooms, attics, garages and patios. They've been seen on power lines in the alleys. Roof rats spend 90% of their life 4 feet or more off the ground.

Why attics?

These rodents are fond of attics because they provide a safe refuge, a nesting place for their young and routes into the home below.

How do they travel?

Roof rats are strongly arboreal and travel along power lines to trees, oleanders, vines and roofs. They can climb up brick walls and other rough surfaces. They can jump 2 feet straight up and 4 feet horizontally (double the horizontal distance if they are jumping from a height). Bear in mind that ground covers and compost bins also provide safe travel routes and nests.

What do they eat and drink?

- They love to eat citrus fruit (because it serves as both a food and water source) and other fruit (pomegranates, figs, etc.), nuts, seeds and stored grains, and vegetables in your garden. They also eat insects, lizards, tree bark, soap, paper, hides, and beeswax.
- Birdseed (both in feeders and stored in bags) and dog and cat food left outside after dark are favorites. Roof rats eat Queen Palm tree fruits in the summer when citrus isn't available.
- Water sources include leaky faucets and sprinkler heads, bird baths, fountains and ornamental ponds, irrigation, air conditioner condensation drip lines, saucers under potted plants, and pet water dishes. They will chew through metal and plastic pipes to reach water.

How do they enter homes?

They enter homes and garden sheds through any opening larger than a nickel. They follow pipes down from the attic, gnaw through drywall, and enter the kitchen or base sink cabinets. They chew through wood, plastic, aluminum siding, sheet rock and soft metals.

When do they travel?

During twilight and nighttime hours in a territory 200 to 300 feet from their daytime nesting locations. They thrive in cool weather and are most active from November through May.

Harvesting citrus and other fruit

- Pick all fruit (ripe or not) on citrus and other fruit and nut trees and pick up any fallen fruit. Do this promptly and completely. Fruit and nut trees having the most activity are the ones which come in contact with other trees, houses, fences or with power lines running through.
- Donate any excess fruit your family won't be able to eat to the closest food bank.

- Next winter, when the roof rats are under control or eradicated altogether, enjoy your harvest, but be sure to pick your fruit promptly and donate what you can't use.

Long-term solutions

- Strongly consider xeriscaping your yard. Xeriscape doesn't have to be gravel and a couple of cactuses. There are many lovely options.
- Combine xeriscape with a citrus-free yard to create a very effective control against roof rats.
- Maintain a defensive line on your property by keeping a clean yard and removing pet food and water dishes at night.

How should I handle dead rats, rat droppings, and nesting areas?

- Use rubber gloves
- Ventilate the affected area the night before cleanup by opening doors and windows
- Spray dead rats, droppings, nests and surrounding areas with a 10% bleach solution (one part bleach and 9 parts water). Allow at least 15 minutes of contact time before removal.
- Clean the affected area with paper towels or a mop. Do not sweep or vacuum. Double bag both the disinfectant-soaked rat and cleanup materials securely in plastic bags and seal. Dispose in city trash containers.
- Before removing gloves, wash in disinfectant, then soap and water. Dispose of gloves with other household waste. Thoroughly wash hands with soap and water.

Do roof rats carry disease?

Roof rats throughout Maricopa County continue to be tested for tularemia (rabbit fever), Hantavirus and plague. **All tests to date have been negative.**