



ONE HOUR TO...

Rodent control

Here are a few simple measures you can take to protect your horses and property from the ravages of rats and mice.

For many of us, the shorter days and cooler temperatures of autumn are accompanied by changing routines and a shift in priorities. The same might be said of rodents. During the warmer months, most rats and mice happily live off the land. When fall arrives, however, vermin seek shelter and warmth—something your barn offers in abundance.

That's why there's no better time to slam the door shut on these unwanted visitors. Of course, traps and deterrent devices—as well as the services of professional exterminators—can go a long way toward reducing rat and mouse populations. But your best bet is to back up these measures with an ongoing effort to make your premises inhospitable to rodents.

By Christine Barakat
Illustration by Celia Strain

Norway rat



roof (black) rat



FAST FACTS

■ Two species of rats can infest barns in North America: the **Norway rat**, which tends to dwell at ground level and in burrows, and the **roof (black) rat**, which may live near the ground but is also capable of climbing atop rafters and lofts. Bubonic plague and typhus are among the diseases transmitted by rats and/or the fleas they harbor.

■ The **house mouse** is also commonly found in homes and on farms. These mice are able to climb, jump and run along narrow wires and cables. They may carry a variety of pathogens, including the organism that causes salmonellosis.

■ In a single year, a female mouse may produce five to 10 litters, each comprised of five or six young. A rat may produce three or four litters of four to six young a year. The average life spans of mice and rats range from nine months to a year.

■ When it comes to food, rats and mice are not discriminating—they will consume virtually anything people, horses, dogs or cats eat.



GEORGE MCCARTHY/CORBIS (BOTTOM); ROB AND ANN SIMPSON/VISUALS UNLIMITED, JOE MCDONALD/VISUALS UNLIMITED (TOP)

10
MINUTES

Close points of entry

Take a few minutes to walk around your barn while keeping the following points in mind:

- ◆ Rodents like to travel under cover. If you've got high grass and weeds around your barn, plan to spend time cutting back the growth. Use a mower for the large patches and a string trimmer to cut back plants right up to your barn's foundation. A height of about two and a half inches is best.

- ◆ Rats and mice often make their own passages. Inspect your barn's foundation for chewed portals and make plans to patch those you discover. To close down an entry point, fill it with material that rodents won't be able to gnaw through, such as steel wool or cement mixed with finely crushed glass. Rat holes in the ground can be filled in with spray insulation.

- ◆ Vermin can pass through surprisingly small openings. Make sure your doors and windows close tightly and keep soffits and your roof in good repair.

- ◆ Unprotected gutters and drain lines offer "express entry" for mice and climbing rats. Cover your gutter spouts and the ends of your drain lines with hardware cloth, a half-inch wire mesh that will allow water through but keep rodents out.



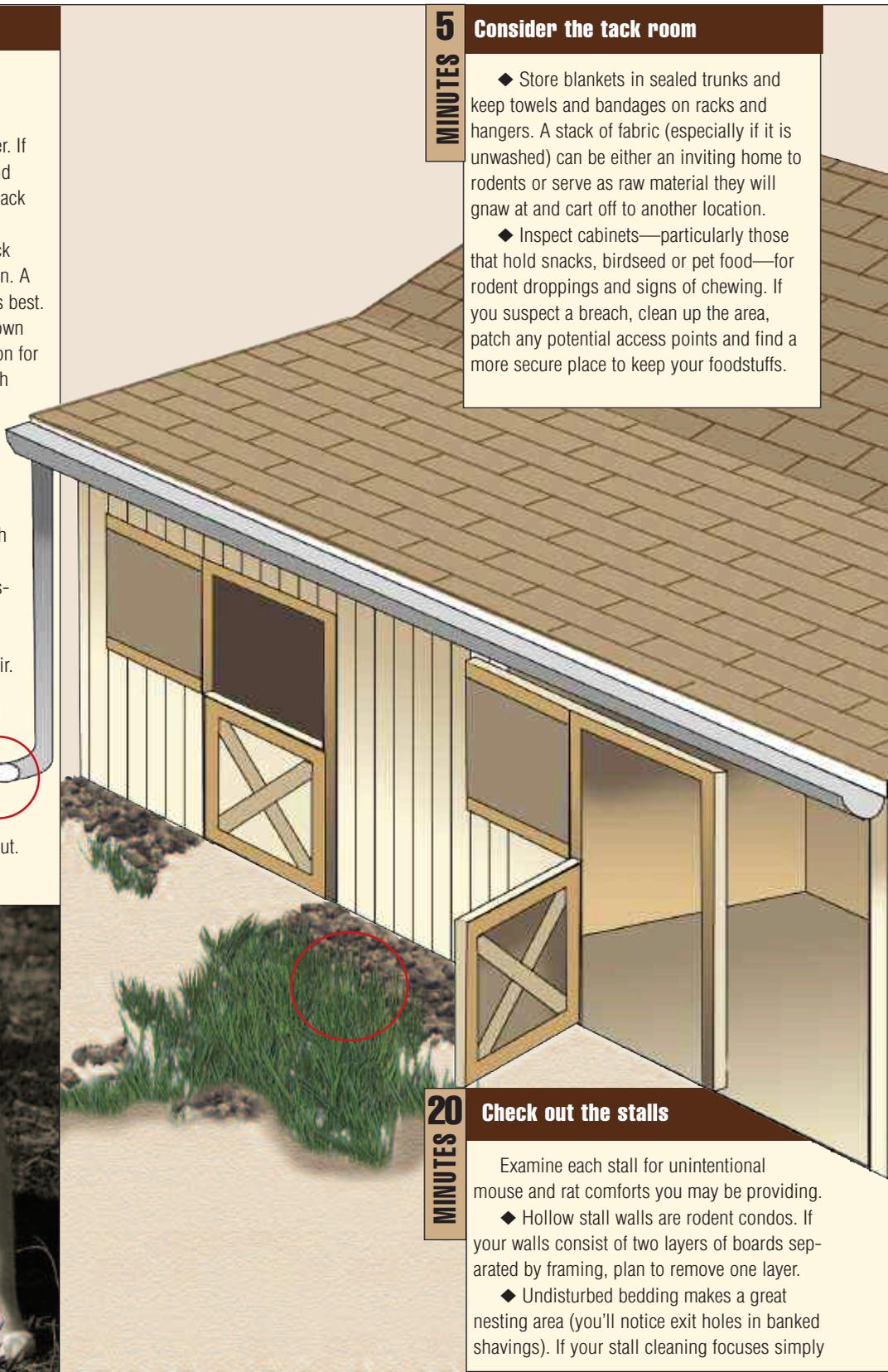
TOM BLACK

5
MINUTES

Consider the tack room

- ◆ Store blankets in sealed trunks and keep towels and bandages on racks and hangers. A stack of fabric (especially if it is unwashed) can be either an inviting home to rodents or serve as raw material they will gnaw at and cart off to another location.

- ◆ Inspect cabinets—particularly those that hold snacks, birdseed or pet food—for rodent droppings and signs of chewing. If you suspect a breach, clean up the area, patch any potential access points and find a more secure place to keep your foodstuffs.



20
MINUTES

Check out the stalls

Examine each stall for unintentional mouse and rat comforts you may be providing.

- ◆ Hollow stall walls are rodent condos. If your walls consist of two layers of boards separated by framing, plan to remove one layer.

- ◆ Undisturbed bedding makes a great nesting area (you'll notice exit holes in banked shavings). If your stall cleaning focuses simply

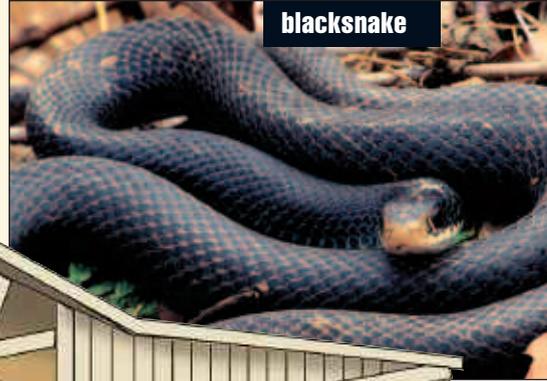
10
MINUTES

Inspect your loft or hay shed

Spend some time making sure your hay storage area doesn't offer too cozy a nesting place for rodents.

- ◆ The space under pallets is ideal for nesting vermin, and if you're not careful, whole communities of rodents may move in. If you use pallets, consider removing them and stacking hay on a layer of clean "fines" instead. You'll get enough air circulation and fewer rats and mice.

- ◆ If you happen to discover a non-poisonous snake, such as a blacksnake, in your hay storage space, leave it there. These reptiles are generally more effective than cats in keeping mice and rat populations at bay because vermin can be their sole source of sustenance.



blacksnake

GREG GOREL/VISUALS UNLIMITED

15
MINUTES

Scrutinize the feed room

An untidy or cluttered feed room can be an all-you-can-eat buffet for rodents. Take a few minutes to make sure you aren't inadvertently offering up a smorgasbord.

- ◆ Store your grain in containers with locking lids. Grain kept in airtight containers is susceptible to dangerous mold growth, however, so don't overdo this measure; opt for closures that are rodent-proof but allow some air to pass.

◆ Secure supplement tubs, and if you dole out daily doses of medication using individual bags prepared ahead of time, store those in a locking container as well.

◆ If you stack unopened bags of grain, consider building a screened storage area. Check for nibbled holes in the bags regularly.

- ◆ Resolve to sweep up any feed spills immediately and dispose of them away from the barn. 

on removing the dirty stuff, resolve to regularly move bedding from stall corners and sides. Also use your pitchfork to clean back to the edge of the stall walls and look for holes and mounds of earth.

- ◆ Vermin always look for easy sources of water. Inspect your automatic waterer and other plumbing for leaks.