



What's living in ***your*** roof?

A guide to managing surprise visitors



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What's living in my roof?

If you have an animal living in your roof, it's probably a possum, rat, bird or lizard.
But most likely a possum or a rat.

Possums

If you have a possum in your roof, it's either a Brushtail or a Ringtail Possum.

These are native marsupials and often crawl into the roof to rest during the day before searching for food outside at night.

It is illegal to harm or relocate possums to other areas.

If you are unsure whether you are living with a possum or rat, place an apple in the ceiling where you suspect the animal is.

If it's completely gone the next morning, you likely have possums.



Rats

If you have a rat in the roof, it's most likely either a black rat (Roof Rat) or a brown rat (Norway Rat).

Unlike possums, rats are not native to Australia and are considered a pest species.

You can humanely trap and dispose of them.

If you are unsure whether you are living with a rat or possum, place an apple in the ceiling where you suspect the animal is.

If it's been gnawed at the next morning, you likely have rats.



What are the signs something is living in my roof?

Structural damage

You may notice plasterboard, the ceiling cavity or weatherboards are damaged.

You may also notice chewed wiring and urine stains.

Nests

Rats that have lived in your roof for a while will create a nest. If you spot one, you most likely have a critter up there.

Droppings and smell

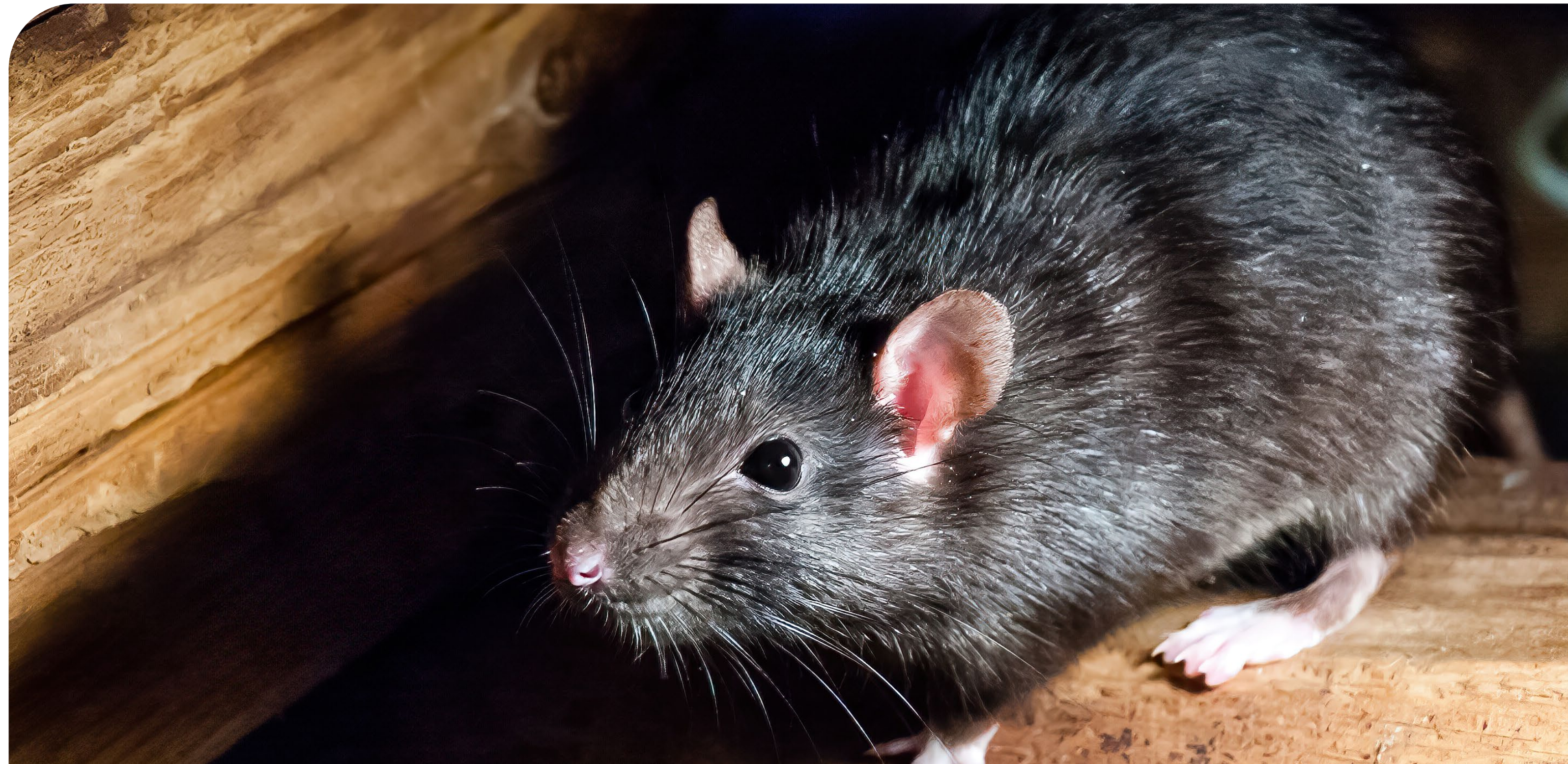
Droppings or a lingering smell are signs that possums or rats are living in your roof. Rat droppings are pointier and skinnier than possum droppings.

Noises

You may hear scurrying, scampering or thumping sounds, particularly at night.

Possums are likely to leave the house at night and return in the early hours of the morning.

They are also significantly heavier than rats, so they generally make more of an impact on the ceiling.



What should I do if something is living in my roof?

Set traps for rats

Traditional snap traps are generally the most effective.

Electronic traps and live traps for capture and release away from your home are also often used.

Poison is not recommended.

Block entryways

Patch holes at night while the possum is out feeding.

You can also deter the possum by coating the entrance with disinfectant. This will prevent the possum from identifying the entranceway.

Call an expert

If are unable to remove the animal yourself, call a Pest Control Expert.

The will make sure the job is done humanely, and in accordance with the correct laws.



General enquiries about possums in your roof can be directed to the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) office, Bunbury 9725 4300, or Collie 9735 198. Photo: Simon Colenutt.

How can I prevent something living in my roof?

Keep your home neat and tidy

Don't leave piles of rubbish lying around. Keep belongings in sealed boxes in your shed and storage areas to prevent rats from nesting.

Don't keep pet food outside

Rats and mice are often attracted to homes because of food. To discourage them, don't leave pet food outside and don't leave food out in the kitchen.

Install nesting boxes

Roofs are a safe, warm and dry space for possums to nest. Installing a nesting box on a tree is a great way to provide an alternative.

Closing entry points

Regular roof maintenance prevents holes that rats, possums, birds and reptiles can enter. When you're inspecting your roof for signs of wear and tear, check under the eaves for gaps.

Trim branches close to your roof

Possums often access the roof by climbing along branches. Don't let branches reach within 1.5m of your gutter.



How do I live happily with possums?

Find out what possums in your area like to eat and plant food sources for them.

Don't feed them people food, especially bread.

Let old growth, big trees and hollow trees stay in your backyard and local area.

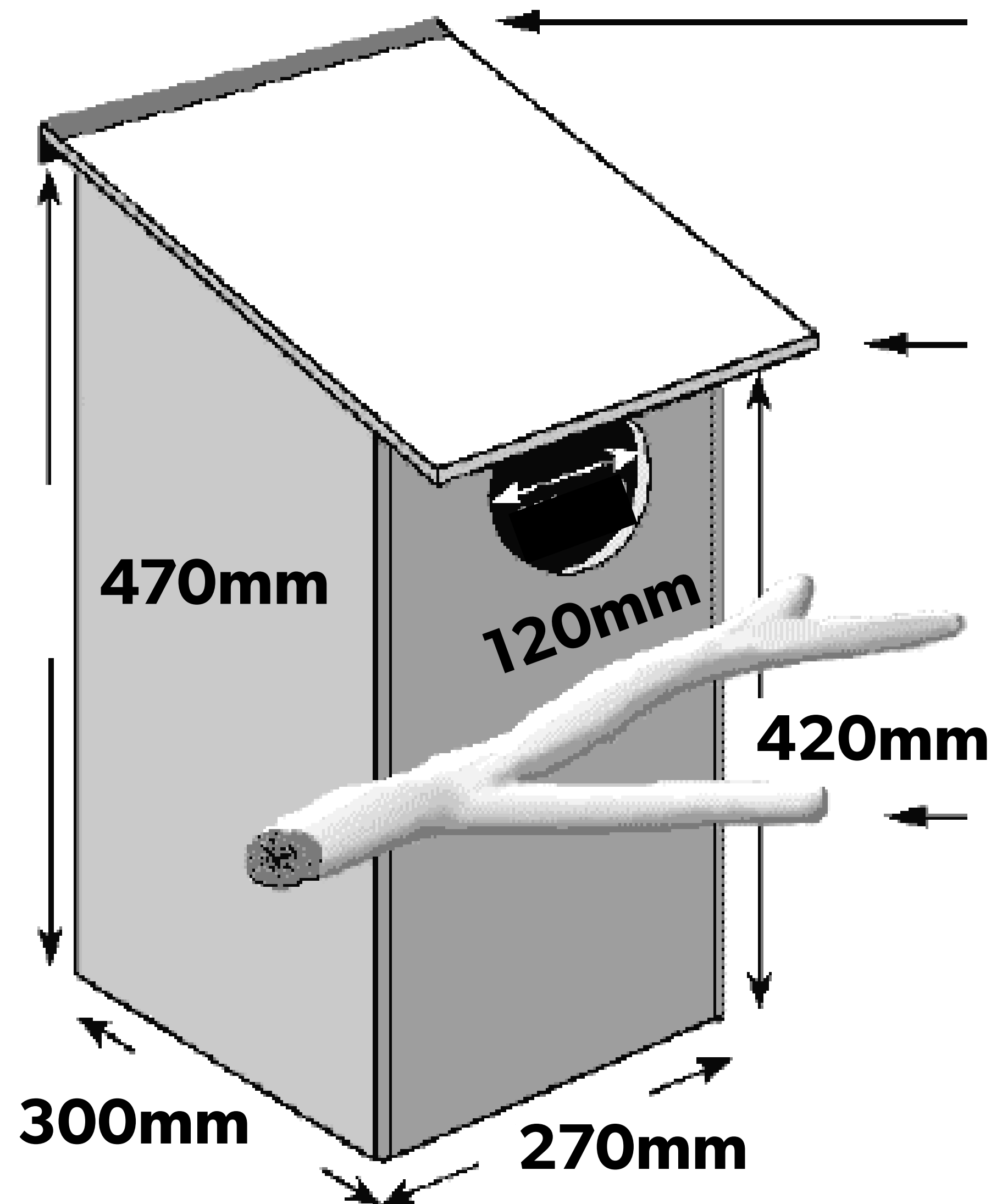
They provide invaluable homes for native animals like possums, birds, bats and gliders.

Leave any leftover or overripe fruit outdoors, but do not feed possums regularly as they can become dependent on people.

Keep your cats and dogs inside at night when possums are active.



How do I build a possum a new home? (Possum box)



The top edge of the roof should be weather sealed with a folded strip of sheet metal, aluminium angle or a rubber flap.

To stop rain getting in, eaves should overhang by 110mm to 120mm. The entry hole should be located directly under it and be between 110mm to 120mm wide.

A sturdy branch screwed firmly to the front of the box is an optional extra that will help the possum enter and exit more easily. Drill four holes (approximately 5 mm) through the floor near each corner, to allow any water that might get in to drain.

Construct your box using 3mm thick plantation pine, structural pine plywood or scrap wood. Remove any nails or staples.

Construct the box so the top can be opened for inspection.

Hang it from branch against the trunk of a tree with a piece of chain threaded through a scrap of garden hose. The hose will prevent damage to your tree.

Include some mesh on the inside and outside under the entry hole, to allow juvenile possums to climb in.

The box will last longer if screwed rather than nailed together. Add filler to any gaps. Complete your project with primer undercoat and a dull acrylic finish in a light cool colour.

Until your box is tenanted, resist the temptation to look inside. Your new neighbours may be checking the box out and waiting to move in when they feel safe!

How do I build a possum a new home? (Drey)

A possum's home is called a drey. You can build a drey using: two medium-sized wire hanging baskets; two coconut fiber basket liners; small cable ties, scissors and wire cutters.

Remove the liner from the top basket. Cut out a small section of the basket to make an entrance. Cut out another section to make an escape in case a predator enters.

Remove the hanging chain from the top and bottom baskets and remove the bottom liner.

Place the two wire baskets together to make a ball and secure with cable ties.

Place the top liner in the ball first, then place the bottom liner. The top liner should sit over the bottom liner. If it rains the water will run off, instead of pooling.

With scissors, make a hole in the top liner on either side of the center wire at the top of the drey. Cable tie the liner to the wire basket to avoid the top collapsing.

Secure the liner edges to the wire basket. Make two 5cm vertical cuts close to the edges of the front entrance. Fold the flap up and cable tie to the wire basket.

In the back exit, cut 5cm vertically up the liner in the middle of the opening (this allows the possum to push the escape open but protects the drey from weather).

Attach the chain to the drey where the two baskets meet to ensure the drey hangs evenly. Trim all cable ties, ensuring there are no sharp edges.



Credit: werribeeriver.org.au



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