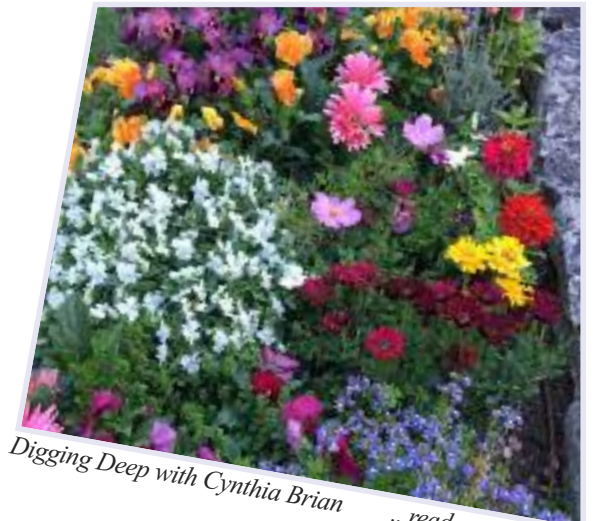


Lamorinda OUR HOMES

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Rats and Mice and Varmints, Oh My!

Drought causing more infestations in Lamorinda homes

By Chris Lavin



Michael Rochette of Canyon proudly displays a wood rat he caught in the lower level of his house, using a live trap. He gave the credit to Sylvester the Cat. The rat was released far, far away. Photo Chris Lavin

Mario Martinez started his own pest-control business about four years ago. He now has 10 employees, and the phone hasn't stopped ringing. Lately it's been worse. (Or better, if one looks at it from his perspective.) On a recent day, he pulled his white truck full of traps and other apparatus to a one-story home in Lafayette that had an understory and unfortunately an infested attic, and knocked on the door.

"I am so glad to see you," the bare-footed homeowner said when he opened the door. "I've waited too long."

Martinez knew exactly what he meant. Martinez has had more calls than ever, because this year's drought has caused a plethora of our usually docile resident rodent creatures that we feel should and will continue to live only in the adjacent areas to our houses – over there out there, somewhere.

Now more rats and mice and other creatures are looking for water and are coming into houses at a high rate, especially in places that border creeks.

"Does your house sound like this?" Martinez asked when he stepped into the Lafayette foyer, and scabbled his fingers against the wall. "Oh, yeah," the homeowner said. "They're in the walls, the attic. They're everywhere."

"Kitchens are the main destination," said Martinez, of All N One Pest Control. He has seen an increase in rats, especially Norway rats, and mice. "Laundry rooms, too. Anywhere there is a pipe leading into the house usually means there is an opening bigger than the pipe. That's what has to be fixed."

The biggest problem homeowners face, according to Bill Snider at Ace Hardware in Moraga, is "they see a rat," he says. "One rat. So they think they have one rat. If you see a rat, it's not a sole rat. It has family. One trap isn't going to do it. People don't want to do what it takes, and check the perimeter of their houses, to find out where they are getting in."

Martinez completely agrees. He is an expert in walking the perimeter. On his visit to the Lafayette house on Quail Run, he started by walking around and under the house. He found several holes where invaders even the size of a raccoon could go in, set up shop, start a family, and install cable TV.

"This place needs a lot of cement work," he said. When he broke the news to the homeowner, the owner nodded knowingly.

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