

## December Gardening Guide

# Get Rid of Uninvited Guests This Season

By Cynthia Brian

*"Regardless of your lot in life, build something beautiful on it." ~ Zig Ziglar*



*Cotoneaster berries add sparkle to the season.*

I was working in my orchard when I heard the screams. Never in my life had I seen four grown men run so quickly. "Are you okay?" I yelled. "What's the commotion?" The men had been dismantling an old hot tub in a deck when their saws had unsettled a family of skunks who had made the warm, dark environment their cozy home. If you've had your dog sprayed by a skunk, you'll understand.

With winter on the horizon, the wild things are looking for shelter. Rats, skunks, mice, raccoons, possums and other critters may decide that "su casa es me casa."

Although we do want to attract birds and pollinators to our gardens by providing food, water and habitats, we don't want to invite the vermin into our territory.

Rodents carry several diseases harmful to humans, including salmonellosis, leptospirosis, hantavirus, and arenavirus. They are not known to have rabies, but skunks can be carriers of rabies.

For prevention and control I consulted with vector control inspector Joe Cleope at the Contra Costa Mosquito and Vector Control District. After a few hours of discussions and inspections, I came away with effective methods of management and control to share with you.

Here's a short list of advice:

**Eliminate the following plants that are considered "rat condos":**

- Ivy
- Bamboo
- Blackberries
- Juniper
- Honeysuckle
- Pampas grass
- Yucca
- Star Jasmine

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*The best rat traps are these quick set reusable snap traps.*