

# Coexisting with Squirrels



No matter where you live in North Carolina chances are you have heard squirrels chattering or witnessed them chasing each other up, down, and around tree trunks.

Squirrels are fun to photograph, exciting to hunt, and are well-adapted to living near humans.

Due to their abundance and distribution, the Eastern Gray Squirrel and the Southern Flying Squirrel are the primary culprits in most squirrel-related nuisance situations.

## Squirrel Quick Facts

### What squirrels call North Carolina home?

The Eastern Gray Squirrel is found statewide. The Southern Flying Squirrel is relatively common but rarely seen due to its nocturnal nature. The Eastern Fox Squirrel, Red Squirrel, and Northern Flying Squirrel have limited distributions in the state.

### Why are squirrels getting in my home?

Squirrels enter homes (typically attics) as an alternative to tree cavities and leaf nests. Your attic provides a warm, safe nesting location to raise young.

### How are squirrels getting in my home?

Squirrels can enter your home through existing holes (e.g., unscreened vents, gaps in siding/shingles, etc.), openings created by squirrels or other animals, or through chimneys. Squirrels can gain access to the roof of a house by jumping from nearby trees or climbing along wires/cables connected to your home.

### Will squirrels attack?

Squirrels will not attack unprovoked but can bite and scratch in self-defense if you try to touch or catch them bare-handed.

### Can squirrels transmit rabies?

All species of mammal are susceptible to rabies virus infection; however, squirrels are rarely found to be infected with rabies. The best rule of thumb is not to handle wildlife, but if you are bitten, seek medical attention.

### Why are squirrels always chewing on things?

Squirrels are rodents, rodents chew on things. Squirrels will frequently chew non-food items to aid in wearing down their continually growing incisors. This behavior often leads to damage of wood and other materials in and around homes.

### What do squirrels eat?

A squirrel's natural diet varies and, depending on the season, can include: buds, twigs, flowers, sap, fruit & seeds (e.g., berries, pine seeds, acorns, hickory nuts, pecans, etc.), mushrooms, and occasionally bird eggs.



# Preventing Conflicts with Squirrels

Once inside your home, squirrels can be noisy neighbors that not only cause structural damage through entry but can also create foul odors, fire hazards (chewing electrical wires), and water damage (chewing water & drain pipes). Squirrels may also feed on garden vegetables, dig up flower bulbs, eat tree crops, dig holes in yards, and consume bird seed from feeders. Here are tips on how to deal with nuisance situations.



Access point into building



Squirrel guard

**Conduct routine checks** for openings that would provide an access point into your home. Look for evidence of chewing where a squirrel is attempting to create a hole. Close all openings with half-inch wire mesh, taking care to ensure that no squirrels are trapped inside. If young squirrels are present, delay repairs until they have matured and exited. After squirrels have matured, install a one-way gate over the point of entry to allow squirrels to exit but not re-enter. Permanently seal openings once all squirrels have been removed.

**Trim** limbs back at least 6 feet from your house to prevent squirrels from jumping from a tree to your roof.

**Encircle isolated trees** with a two-foot-wide collar of smooth metal 6 feet above ground to prevent squirrels from depredating crop trees (e.g., pecans, apples, etc.). Attach the collar with encircling wires held together with springs to allow for tree growth. This technique can also be used on trees near homes to prevent squirrels from jumping from trees to your roof. This will not work if the canopies of nearby trees are within jumping distance of a squirrel.

**Avoid conditioning squirrels** to expect a meal at your house. Remove bird feeders. If you choose to feed songbirds, use feeders that exclude squirrels. Predator guards should be installed and placed higher than a squirrel can jump. Placing feeders in open areas away from trees prevents squirrels from jumping down on the feeder from a tree limb.

**Fox, gray and red squirrels can be hunted** during the open squirrel season where use of firearms and hunting is allowed. (Note: fox squirrels can only be hunted in specified counties. For more info go to: <http://www.ncwildlife.org/Hunting/SeasonLimits.aspx>)

Squirrels that are **in the act of causing property damage** may be shot by the landowner **without** a depredation permit. For more info go to: <http://www.ncwildlife.org/Licensing/Regulations/NongameandOtherRegulations/WildlifeDepredation.aspx>. Check with local city or county authorities regarding restrictions on the discharge of firearms.

**A depredation permit is required** to trap a squirrel causing property damage. For more info go to: <http://www.ncwildlife.org/Licensing/Regulations/NongameandOtherRegulations/WildlifeDepredation.aspx>

**If a squirrel has caused property damage** and you need assistance, contact a Wildlife Damage Control Agent (a private individual who charges for his/her services). A list of agents in your area is available at <http://www.ncwildlife.org/HaveaProblem.aspx>

**Repellents are available** at numerous lawn and garden retailers; however, the effectiveness of repellents is often debated. The amount of chemical needed to actually deter a squirrel and the frequency of reapplication required usually makes the treatment inefficient. The use of moth balls in attics is not recommended.



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