

Wildlife Information -- Squirrels

The **Santa Monica Animal Control Division** offers the following information[†] about squirrels.

Squirrel Facts

Most squirrels weigh between 15 and 25 ounces, and are 7 to 12 inches in length. Their home range is from one to seven acres, and their life span is one to three years. Squirrels have two litters per year, one in the spring (February to April depending upon temperatures) and one in the fall (July to September). Squirrels eat tree nuts, plant seeds, fruit, flowers, bulbs, mushrooms, tree bark and some animal matter.

Problems & Solutions

Any habitat-altering methods must be employed consistently for two weeks and monitored closely. If you are not consistent, they will become more aggressive and persistent. The best method to prevent problems with squirrels is to alter their habitat. Persistence and multiple controls work best.

- Ⓒ Any method must be used a minimum of two weeks.
- Ⓒ Make sure squirrels are the culprits. If damage is done at night, another animal is causing the problem.

What attracts squirrels to a residence?

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| Ⓒ birdseed | Ⓒ bulbs | Ⓒ berries |
| Ⓒ water | Ⓒ flowers | Ⓒ fruits |
| Ⓒ pet food | Ⓒ deciduous trees | |
| Ⓒ shelter | Ⓒ plant seeds | |

What deters squirrels from a residence?

- Ⓒ rags soaked in ammonia
- Ⓒ socks filled with mothballs
- Ⓒ cayenne pepper squirrel repellent

Recipe for Squirrel Repellent

- 1) 1 Bottle (small) hot pepper sauce
- 2) 1 Gallon water
- 3) Water retentative (available from plant nursery), or 1 teaspoon of mild liquid detergent such as dishwashing detergent.

Directions: Spray this repellent on plants or anything you would like protected from chewing, until a permanent exclusion of welded wire or hardware cloth can be applied. Many commercial products designed to repel rodents are not effective. In fact, one study has shown that the animals actually eat more of the plants after the repellent is applied. **Please remember:** mothballs are toxic when ingested. Children's curiosity and birds' lack of smell can increase their chances of ingesting mothballs. Children and birds should not have access to the mothball filled socks.

Squirrels Damaging Gardens and Trees

Tree bark, fruits, and nuts are important food sources for squirrels. Squirrels can cause damage to vegetation, but they can also be very beneficial as natural tree trimmers. They prune branches and twigs when feeding and making nests which promotes vegetation growth. If you want to keep squirrels away from your plants, try the following ideas:

- Ⓒ Plant your bulbs in a coating of cayenne pepper.
- Ⓒ Spray squirrel repellent directly on the plants.
- Ⓒ Place a two-foot band of sheet metal (forming a cone, large opening downwards) around the trunk approximately six feet off the ground. (For this to be effective, the tree needs to be at least 10 feet from other trees.)

Squirrel Nest in the Attic

Females often enter buildings to build a nest. They only need an opening with a diameter of 1½ inches. They invariably find an entrance high on a structure and exploit an existing hole or enlarge one by gnawing it. A homeowners first sign of squirrel presence is usually the sound of scampering in the attic.

- Ⓒ Thoroughly inspect inside and outside of attic to find opening.
- Ⓒ Try to locate presence of babies.
- Ⓒ If no young are present, try to frighten the adult out by banging rafters and wait until all have left, usually during the day.
- Ⓒ If young are present it is best to wait until they are able to leave by themselves (usually only six to eight weeks).
- Ⓒ Seal up the opening and any weak spots with ½ inch wire or sheet metal. Extend metal six inches beyond opening to prevent gnawing by squirrels.
- Ⓒ You may want to apply the squirrel repellent mixture (see above) around the covered opening. The mixture may stain, but it is effective.

Note: If there are two or three adults in the attic, there are probably no babies. The male sticks around to mate and then splits to find another mate. If only one adult is in the attic, babies are likely.

Squirrel Loose in the House

Most squirrels that have entered the house have done so by accident. They want to leave just as much as you want them to. If the exact location is known, close all the interior doors to limit its movement and open any windows or exterior doors to the room with the squirrel. If left alone, the squirrel will find the opening and will readily jump from a second story building without harming itself.

Squirrels Raiding the Bird Feeder

Squirrels often become nuisances at bird feeders because they are particularly adept at overcoming obstacles when the reward is food. If a feeder is placed more than eight feet from a tree or a building and not placed under anything from which a squirrel can jump, or if the feeder is on a pole, a protective squirrel baffle at least 18 to 24 inches wide will help. You can also try to "squirrel proof" your feeder by enclosing it in a wire cage and cutting holes big enough for birds - but not for squirrels. They will work at the wire so impede their progress by making repairs when needed. You can add cayenne pepper to the bird seed. This will deter squirrels and not affect birds.

Hang feeders from a horizontal wire that is protected by loose sleeves of small diameter smooth metal pipe. If the swiveling pipe sections are 28 inches or longer, most squirrels cannot jump across.

Trapping and Relocating Squirrels

Discourage the use of live traps to relocate squirrels. Relocating individual squirrels away from their home range, without altering the habitat, is merely a short term solution. Relocating animals will cause more long term problems for the homeowner by actually increasing the local population. By removing existing squirrels you invite others to come in and compete for the new resources created by the available territory, resulting in more squirrels than you had before in a relatively short period of time. Due to increased resources, litter size tends to increase as well since squirrels can breed twice a year, the results of trapping can be noticed relatively quickly. If a squirrel is removed from a habitat, other types of animals requiring the same resources as squirrels (for example rats and mice) may increase to take advantage of the increased food/resource availability.

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