

Squirrels!

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Based on the volume of calls I received last week related to squirrel infestations in homes, I feel I should be concerned about an impending full-scale squirrel invasion of Madison County. Hopefully this is not the case, but in all seriousness, squirrels can cause homeowners many problems this time of year by invading attic spaces and setting up shop for the winter.

You should first determine which kind of squirrel you might have. The common gray squirrel will make noise at dawn and dusk as they are coming in and out of the attic, while the smaller flying squirrel will cause commotion during the middle of the night since they are nocturnal animals. Regardless of which squirrel species you may have residing in your house, your options are mostly limited to preventing entrance to the attic and trapping the animals. Repellants rarely work and poisons aren't recommended; once squirrels are poisoned in the attic, they most often find a wall to hide in making it nearly impossible to remove the dead squirrel. This is a totally different problem that you also don't want to deal with.

Preventing a squirrel's entrance into your attic or house may prove difficult, but it will be the best long-term option in terms of preventing this from happening again. Squirrels, especially flying squirrels, can find holes smaller than the size of a quarter to squeeze through, so be thorough in inspecting your roof for holes. Common entrances include loose screen or holes in attic vents, gaps above gutters, or holes in siding. To help determine where they might be entering, you can have a "stake out" in your yard for about an hour at sunset to watch the squirrels in action. Once you find the holes, they can be sealed with wood, metal, or ½ inch wire mesh. You must firmly nail these materials in place so they are not removed by persistent vermin. To test to see if you've successfully blocked access, or trapped a squirrel inside the attic, place some bread crumbs with peanut butter in the attic to attract any squirrels.

You should also make it harder on squirrels to gain access to your roof by removing any overhanging limbs that are close to the roof. You can also have an electrician put plastic pipe around any cables that come into the house. This serves two purposes: it keeps the squirrels from gaining traction on the cables and might also keep them from chewing on the cables.

Trapping is your other main option in eliminating your squirrel problem. You can purchase live cage traps such as the Havahart and Tomahawk brands. If you have flying squirrels, you will need a trap with a fine wire mesh so they cannot escape. Flying squirrels are also easier to trap inside the attic while gray squirrels are easier to trap outdoors. You will have to gradually lure flying squirrels into your trap by first placing bait such as peanut butter or sunflower seeds next to the trap to get them used to it, then move the bait inside the trap without setting it, and then finally place the bait inside the set trap. For

gray squirrels, place a trap outside on a piece of cardboard with birdseed scattered around it and inside the trap past the trigger plate. You may occasionally trap birds, but you should ultimately capture the squirrels.

If all of this sounds like too much trouble for some pesky squirrels, you can also hire a professional to come in and control the squirrel problem for you. If you have squirrels around your house, they will likely be a persistent problem getting into your attic, so vigilance is important in keeping their options limited. We have several publications available free of charge at the Extension office related to several nuisance wildlife problems. You can also give us a call at 706-795-2281.

Happy Hunting!