# http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-MtiWYa8QbpU/T-9vJQujdZI/AAAAAAAAB84/hMpQeulOYCY/s1600/How+To+Draw+A+Squirrel.jpgWhat to Do About Squirrels

*Adapted from the book Wild Neighbors*

Tree squirrels are cute, fuzzy, and fun to watch, but humans have something of a love/hate relationship with them. We love their crazy antics—but we hate when they're raiding our birdfeeders.

If you've got squirrels driving you nutty, remember that they're only doing what's natural: looking for a meal and a safe place to sleep at night. Whether you need to evict them from your attic or stop them from stealing your bird food, be patient and look for a way that won't harm the critters or their young.

**Protect your plants, trees, bulbs, lawns, and outdoor furniture from squirrels**

Squirrels may nibble on some flowers and trees, dig holes in lawns, and even chew on wooden decks and furniture. Before you blame the squirrels, though, make sure the damage isn't caused by another animal.

Squirrels are only active during the day, so you should be able to catch them in the act. Squirrels generally don't do significant damage to plants, but if a squirrel is indeed the culprit, keep him away from the plant with fencing or a wire mesh cage.

Dust cayenne pepper or chili powder on plants and other areas where squirrels cause problems in the garden. Additionally, sprinkle the spices on the ground around plants. Reapply often because the substances are washed away fairly quickly. Birds aren't bothered by capsaicin, so you can safely mix cayenne powder or chili powder with birdseed.

Homemade hot pepper sprays are often effective squirrel deterrents. Mix a small bottle of hot sauce and a few drops of mild liquid dish detergent with 1 gallon of water, then pour the mixture into a spray bottle. Although dish detergent is optional, it helps the hot pepper spray stick to the leaves. Spray plants as needed then reapply after watering or a rainfall.

### Trees

Small fruit and nut trees can be protected by netting the entire tree for the short period when squirrel (or other animal) damage is most likely. Fruit trees may be protected by wrapping a two-foot band of sheet metal around the trunk about six feet off the ground, as long as the squirrels cannot jump on them from adjoining trees. Do not to leave the bands on any longer than necessary, since insect damage might occur, and the trunks of sensitive trees may get sunscald if bands are removed after a long time. Branches growing below six feet also may have to be trimmed.

### Flower bulbs

Squirrels will dig up and eat tulip and crocus bulbs, but they don't like daffodils, so consider investing your bulb-planting energies in daffodils. For other bulbs, soak them in a repellent with Thiram as the active ingredient (and labeled for use as a squirrel repellent) before planting. Lay chicken wire over the planting bed or use wire bulb cages.

### Lawns

The tiny holes, about the size of a quarter, that seem to pop up all over the lawn in the fall are likely to be a sure sign of squirrel activity. Squirrels bury or cache their winter food supply and rely later on an incredible sense of smell to be able to relocate their buried treasure.  Any "damage" they create in these activities is likely to be so slight that tolerance and time are all you need. The lawn will heal itself by spring. Just consider it free aeration for your lawn!

### Wood decks and furniture

If squirrels are gnawing on deck railings or wooden lawn furniture, try capsaicin-based repellents (see below) or lightly rubbing the exposed surfaces with a bar of soap. Use caution with capsaicin; it can be transferred to your hands and will cause intense irritation if you rub it into your eyes.

### A note on squirrel repellents

There are several repellents on the market that may deter squirrels. In addition to repellents with Thiram as the active ingredient, there are ones with capsaicin or oil of mustard as active ingredients, which you can spray on plants when they first emerge in the spring. You can also use these repellents on patches over squirrel entry holes in buildings to discourage gnawing in attempts to re-enter.

Capsaicin products are also used to coat birdseed to repel squirrels. Birds aren’t irritated by capsaicin-based products, but mammals are. However, we don’t recommend using capsaicin-coated birdseed because there are less harmful, more effective ways to keep squirrels out of bird feeders.

# Squirrels in the Attic

Squirrels living in attics are a concern because they may gnaw on boards and electrical wires. Usually, the most serious problems come from nesting adult females. They often build their nests near openings, such as an unscreened vent or loose or rotten trim boards.

The first sign of squirrels in the attic is usually the sound of scampering during the day, as they come and go on foraging trips. Juvenile squirrels, and sometimes adults, may fall into wall cavities and be unable to climb out, making persistent scratching noises as they try to escape, and eventually dying if they can’t. Here's what to do if you've got squirrels in your attic:

* **Find the point of entry.** Thoroughly inspect the inside of the attic to find the opening(s). If there is no way into the attic, inspect the exterior eaves, vents, and roof.
* **Find out if it's a mother squirrel with young.** Try to locate her nest (probably made of readily available materials like insulation, cardboard, and leaves). If it's February through May or August through October, you can be sure that babies are present. In that case, the best thing to do is wait a few weeks until the babies grow old enough to leave with their mother—they won't survive without her. Don’t try to trap and relocate the family yourself.
* **Get them out.** If you can't wait until the mother and babies leave on their own, hire a professional who knows how to reunite mothers with their offspring. If you find the nest and there are no baby squirrels, you can try to frighten the adult squirrels into leaving. It might be as easy as banging on the rafters or going into the attic and speaking loudly. You can also try putting a bright light in the attic and leaving it on, playing a radio around the clock, or putting rags soaked with cider vinegar in the attic (squirrels don't like the smell). Or you can just wait until you’re sure all the squirrels have left, which they usually do during the day.
* **Keep them out.** We recommend installing metal flashing to keep squirrels from re-opening access points into attics. Often, they will attempt to get back in anyway, and this can be a signal that young are trapped inside.

### Important precautions

Listen carefully after excluding to be sure no squirrel is trapped inside or has gotten back in. Watch closely to see if the squirrel keeps trying to get back inside. Mothers will go to extremes to get back to their babies, and frantic attempts to reenter are usually strong evidence that young are still inside. In this case, remove the patch, let the mother return, and watch to see if she moves the litter.

If it's really cold out, it's best to wait until spring before removing the squirrels. Excluding them in the depth of winter might compromise their survival.

### Exposed wiring

Squirrels who have been in attics for a while may have chewed on exposed wiring, which might cause a fire. Once they are gone, ask an electrician to closely inspect all exposed wiring.

### Beyond the attic

In tight places, such as crawl spaces between floors, try snaking a vacuum cleaner hose into the restricted space. Reverse the setting to blow air, and leave the vacuum on until the nester leaves to seek more pleasant digs.

Sometimes squirrels enter chimneys and are unable to climb back out, forcing them to try to get out from a fireplace or basement ducts.

Assume that the squirrel you hear scrambling in a chimney is trapped, unless you’ve got clear evidence she is able to climb back out on her own.

Never try to smoke a squirrel (or any other animal) out of a chimney—a trapped animal or babies too young to climb out may be killed. If the squirrel is not trapped, try to encourage her on her way with noise.

Never try use smoke or fire to drive a squirrel out of a chimney!

### Provide an escape route

Try hanging a three-quarter-inch or thicker rope down the chimney to give her a way to escape. Be sure to tie one end of the rope to the top of the chimney before lowering the other end, and make certain that the rope is long enough to reach the damper or smoke shelf. Don’t lower anything into the chimney that you can’t easily retrieve. The squirrel will climb up the rope and escape, usually within a few (daylight) hours. Once you’re certain that the squirrel has escaped, remove the rope and cap the chimney with a commercially made cap.

### Make some noise

If a squirrel is actually in the fireplace itself (behind glass or a screen), try making enough noise to scare her back up above the damper. Then close the damper and follow the escape route directions above.

### Catch and release

If the squirrel cannot or will not leave the fireplace, the next best option is a suitable live trap.

* Before opening the doors of the fireplace to set the trap, close any interior doors in the room and open an exterior door or window in line of sight from the fireplace, if possible, so the squirrel has a way out. If the squirrel gets out of the fireplace, do not chase it.
* Bait a humane live trap with peanut butter and set it very carefully inside the fireplace. Most squirrels will retreat to a back corner of the fireplace as the doors are opened and stay there if you place the live trap slowly and quietly just inside the doors.
* Close the doors and leave the room to wait for the squirrel to enter the trap.
* Take the squirrel outside and carefully open the trap door while standing behind the trap. The squirrel will usually bolt immediately out of the trap.
* If not, you can wedge the door open or tie it open with a zip tie and stand back to let the squirrel leave on her own.

### Put a cap on it

The chance of that squirrel returning to the chimney is slim since she was probably trapped in there by accident. But have a cap installed as soon as it is practical to do so. If you're a do-it-yourselfer, be sure to purchase an approved chimney cap, and follow installation directions carefully to prevent future visits of the animal kind. Ask a local certified chimney sweep about any local building codes regarding cap installation, and check these recommendations for good venting practices.

Sometimes they get in through an open door or window. Others may come down the chimney and through the fireplace.

However they got there, a squirrel that has entered a house is there by accident and will be desperate to get out.

### Show that squirrel the door

Place your pets in another room. Close all interior doors and open a window or exterior door in the room. Leave the squirrel alone, so she can find her way out. She may even jump from a second-story window onto a lawn without harming herself, but don’t let her jump onto concrete.

If there is no possible exit, set a humane trap baited with peanut butter on the floor near the squirrel and leave her alone for a few hours. If obtaining a live trap isn’t an option, try this method using a blanket:

* Put on heavy gloves.
* Slowly approach the squirrel with the blanket held in front of your body, so that she doesn’t see a human form.
* Drop the blanket on the squirrel and quickly roll it up, taking care not to put too much weight or pressure on her.
* Take the squirrel in the blanket immediately outside and gently open the blanket on the ground, letting the squirrel escape.

Once the squirrel is out, look for the entryway and take steps to keep it from happening again. Look for tracks in soot or dust around the fireplace or furnace that may show she came down the chimney or flue, and check the attic for evidence of a nest or entrance hole that may need repair.