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The Attack of the Squirrels

I continually get calls from folks with squirrel problems. Many people have the misconception that squirrels are sweet, cuddly, furry, hugable, teddy-bear like animals; until, they start damaging their homes, gardens, trees, lawns, etc. Squirrels are wild animals in the rodent family. I call them "rats with tails." Their curious nature leads them into all types of propriety damage. Therefore, many homeowners feel that they are under attack by the squirrels and would like to destroy them with a bazooka like Patch Adams. But, squirrel problems, especially in the city, are not so easily solved.

A good country boy like myself gets a hunting license, shotgun, and #6 shot then has squirrel and dumplings for supper. However, if you are in the city or have others living nearby other control techniques must be employed. To keep squirrels from having a party in your attic, garage, or out-building exclude or "build them out." Since squirrels have large front teeth and can chew through window screen and steel wool use 1/4 or 1/2 inch hardware cloth or 26 gauge metal when excluding squirrels.

The best way to eliminate squirrels that have entered a building is to find all their entrances and travel routes. Be sure to look for eave openings, attic vents, loose flashing around chimneys and pipes and openings around cables. Plug all entrances except one, and set a trap at the open entrance. Once the squirrels have been eliminated from the building, be sure to repair any damage they caused. To prevent further damage, trim all trees which have limbs within eight feet of the building. Squirrels can be discouraged from climbing trees if you put a band of two-foot-wide sheet metal six feet away from the bottom of the tree. Remove any branches less than six feet from the ground to prevent squirrels from jumping onto them. If the squirrels are gaining access via telephone or electrical wires, put a two-foot section of lightweight 2- to 3-inch diameter plastic pipe over the wire by slitting the pipe lengthwise and placing it over the wire. Be careful not to touch the wire. The pipe will rotate on the wire causing squirrels to tumble.

Many repellents can be used to repel or reduce damage by squirrels. Squirrels may temporarily vacate an attic and give you enough time to seal entrances if you place mothballs correctly throughout the attic. Use one pound of mothballs per 100 square feet of attic space. Because the mothball vapors are heavier than air, they must be suspended in baseball-size clumps close to the damaged area. Using old pantyhose is an inexpensive, effective way to do this. Some other substances can be sprayed on wood to repel squirrels including 1 teaspoon Lysol or 3 ounces Epsom Salts per gallon water.

Also, a variety of traps can be used to catch squirrels. Both kill and live bait traps are effective, and even large rat snap-traps can be used if nailed to a tree or house 15 to 20 feet above ground. Remember that once squirrels are captured they must be kill or destroyed. Releasing trapped squirrels in faraway locations spreads squirrel disease and insect problems. But, the best way I know to catch a squirrel is to “climb a tree and act like a nut.” If all else fails put up a feeder just for the squirrels filled with cheap sunflower seeds, and enjoy their antics.

To learn the specifics on gardening we have both free and for-sale publications at our office in the back of the Public Services Building on the corner of Third Loop and Irby. You may also visit our Home & Garden Information Center through our web site at www.clemson.edu/florence. I may be contacted through our web site, amelton@clemson.edu, or 661-4800.

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