



HOW TO

**PROTECT YOUR
ATTIC FROM
SQUIRRELS
THIS WINTER**



Squirrels may be cute and cuddly, but they make horrible house guests. Most homeowners don't fully understand the damage their constant gnawing can do to a home until it's too late. If that isn't bad enough, their droppings, urine, and other biological material can be hazardous to humans that they share a living space with.

For the good of your home and the people in it, you can't afford to let squirrels make a nest in your home this winter.

WHY SQUIRRELS BREAK IN DURING THE WINTER

Regardless of the species, the likelihood of a pest break-in only increases as temperatures drop. In the winter months, animals are always on the search for a nest that's safe, warm, and close to a food source - and if they can't find one, they'll make one.

Unfortunately, the attic in most homes is more than enough to meet all three of these criteria - which is exactly why attic pest infestations are so common in the winter. However, of all the wildlife threatening your home, squirrels are one of the most common invaders.

The most common breed in the southeastern United States, Eastern grey squirrels have seen a major population boom in recent years. Their incredible climbing skills make them well-equipped to get to your roof, and from there it's only a matter of time until they make their way into the attic. Making matters worse, while squirrel population is on the rise, urban development and deforestation leave them with fewer natural habitats to take shelter in.

Because of these factors, it's inevitable that some attics will come under squirrel infestation this winter. If you want to ensure your own attic doesn't come under attack, read on for more information.

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Winter Warning Signs of Rodent Infestation

If you're experiencing a squirrel infestation, or are afraid you could be, perform a thorough inspection of your home, starting with the exterior and then moving inside. Though they aren't as good at squeezing into small spaces as rats and mice, they are adept at gnawing on any existing holes they find in order to gain entry, so finding any gaps or tears that could present an entry point should be priority number one.

Here are some key signs OR things to watch out for:

Exterior Damage

Check for signs of damage to the siding or along the roof line. On the roof, lookout for damaged shingles, chimney flashing, fascia boards, vents, and soffits, as these are all common points of entry. Make sure to record your findings so you can come back and fix these problems later.

Besides damaging the home itself, squirrels can also disrupt the surrounding flora and fauna, eating plants and destroying bird-feeders. They are also known to dig holes in the yard.

Interior Damage

Once you've gone over the exterior of the home, it's time to check the interior. Check for any gnawing or teeth marks around the house, particularly on shutters and window sills, and as always, pay close attention for any potential entry points.

The attic is the part of your home most vulnerable to squirrel infestation, so be thorough here. Watch out for shredded insulation or duct work, which squirrels will often repurpose for nest materials.

Squirrels are also notorious for chewing on electrical wires, presenting a huge fire hazard. If you find a wire that squirrels have been using as a chew toy, waste no time in contacting a professional - it could save your home and possessions from severe fire damage.

Droppings

If you find any squirrel droppings inside the home, especially in the attic, an infestation is almost certain. Squirrel droppings are small and cylindrical, brown to red in coloration, and $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch long on average. These are often located in clusters near feeding sites and near the nest.

Of course, the average homeowner probably can't tell the difference between the droppings squirrels leave from those left by other common household pests like rats or bats. Regardless of the source, finding animal droppings anywhere inside your home means something has found its way inside. If you want to know for certain, your best bet is to bring a knowledgeable pest control specialist on board.

Nest Materials

Even if they're in the home, squirrels will use many of the same basic components to build their indoor nests that they would on an outdoor nest. Look for clumps of leaves, grass, sticks, bark, paper, moss, and other outdoor elements that a squirrel might be using as construction materials.

Odor

Even before beginning your inspection, you may have noticed a foul odor in the house. The foul, musty odor that emanates from the nest is often the first tip off for a homeowner that his or her house is suffering an infestation.

The worse the infestation, the more pungent the smell. Of course, if their natural odor wasn't bad enough already, it's made even worse when compounded with the lingering smell from the urine and feces around the nest. If you're unlucky enough to have a squirrel in your attic die, and the body isn't removed, the smell can quickly become unbearable.

Activity

While most homeowners learn about their squirrel problem using clues they find around the home, in some cases squirrels can make their presence known directly.

Unlike most other wildlife invaders, squirrels aren't nocturnal, so it's not uncommon for a homeowner to see one scamper across the floor or hear them scratching in the walls.

Watch for activity outside the home as well. Squirrels are widespread throughout the southeast, so seeing them outside your home does not necessarily mean that they've gotten inside. However, if you see squirrels fighting, it often means the local population has grown out of control and that you could have a severe infestation on your hands.

Nearby Nests

Squirrels will often make multiple nests in close proximity that they'll move between in order to find food and evade predators. Check the treeline around your home; if you see several nearby, it could be a good indication of an infestation.

Tracks

Squirrels leave distinctive paw prints as they travel back and forth from the nest: four fingers each on the front paws, five fingers each on the hind paws. In wintertime, these tracks can be easily identified in mud or snow.

Related Problems

Squirrels love to gnaw on anything they can get their paws on; consequently, a squirrel infestation often brings a host of other problems with it. If your roof has suddenly sprung a leak or you've started to see bugs all around your home, it's worth considering that a squirrel could be the culprit.

Finding and Blocking Squirrel Entry Points

While squirrels can make entrances to your home just about anywhere, here are some of the most common break-in points, and some strategies you can use to block entry in these areas:

ROOF AND CHIMNEY

Most squirrels get into a home's attic through the roof, so inspect yours thoroughly for any signs of damaged or missing shingles and replace as necessary. Likewise, look for any holes in the roof line and seal them as quickly as possible.

Gaps in the flashing at the chimney base are another common squirrel entry point, so install steel caps around the base to keep them out. These caps can range in price from about \$40 to over \$1000, so do your research to find the best fit for your roof before you make a purchase.

THE ATTIC

First, inspect the attic with the lights on, looking for any holes or signs of infestation and taking note of any problem areas. Once that's complete, turn off all the lights in the attic and block any windows. If any light is still getting inside, you can probably trace it back to a hole somewhere in the roof or siding.

Attic vents are a common problem area, so fasten a ¼-inch wire hardware cloth over them to prevent entry. Extend the cloth two inches beyond the hole in all directions to stop squirrels from gnawing around it, and secure the cloth with a staples, U nails, or regular nails. Reinforce the cloth with sheet metal screws.

TREES AND BRANCHES

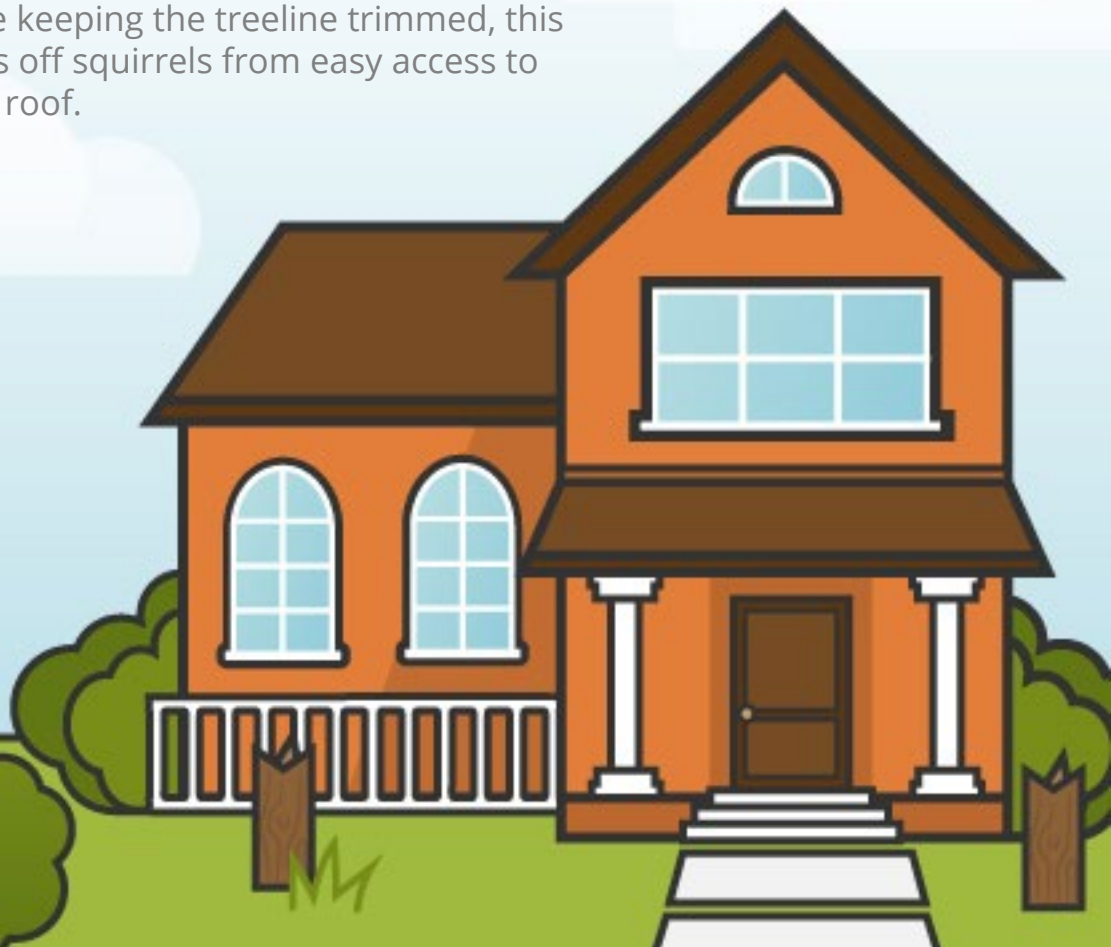
Squirrels can generally climb straight up the side of a home but prefer to use tree branches to jump onto the roof. Keep the treeline around your home trimmed so that the nearest perch is at least 6-8 feet away from the house. This will limit a squirrel's ability access your roof by jumping from nearby tree branches.

Prevent squirrels from climbing trees near the home by attaching a two-foot band of sheet metal around the trunk roughly 6-8 feet off the ground. Fasten the sheet metal to the tree by wrapping wires around the trunk and attaching them together with springs, which will allow the metal to expand as the tree grows.

WALLS AND SIDING

Inspect the walls and siding on the home for any holes or potential entry points, paying particular attention to ridge and soffit vents. Repair any cracks or holes in the foundational wall, using metal materials where possible to prevent squirrels from gnawing more holes in the future.

You'll also want to move any standing structures or debris (piles of firewood, tires, etc.) that a squirrel could potentially climb several feet away from the home. Like keeping the treeline trimmed, this cuts off squirrels from easy access to the roof.



Trapping and Exclusion

When it comes to squirrels, exclusion is always a better solution than extermination. Beyond the legal ramifications (there are no jurisdictions in North America that permit poisoning of tree squirrels), why leave yourself with the hassle (not to mention the smell) of cleaning up an attic full of dead squirrels when the humane solution is both cleaner and more effective?

By this point, you have completed a thorough inspection of your home and identified any gaps squirrels are using to gain entry, so place traps along the path(s) they use to get in and out of these areas. If you've successfully located all of the squirrels' points of entry, you can simply mount a one-way door or repeater trap directly on top of each hole and wait for the squirrels to leave of their own accord.

BAITS

When it comes to baits, peanuts or peanut butter work best for squirrels. However, on the whole, type of bait is far less important. The type of trap, where it is located, how it is set are generally much more important in determining the trap's effectiveness. Applying bait just gives the squirrel even more incentive to enter the trap.

REMOVAL

Once you've captured a live squirrel, take it about 4-5 miles away from your home before setting it loose. Otherwise, you risk the squirrel immediately breaking back in.

Just remember that trapping alone is generally not enough to fully eliminate a squirrel infestation; without sealing off the entry points they used, more squirrels will just move in and take the place of the old ones. And even if you can successfully trap and relocate every squirrel in your home and stop them from getting back in, you'll still be left with the task of cleaning up the urine, droppings, and other biohazards that they left behind. Live animal trapping regulations vary from state to state, so make sure to check for legality before setting any traps.

While traps can supplement your efforts, hiring a professional is still the safest and almost always the most cost-effective option for the average homeowner.



Common Mistakes to Avoid for Homeowners

Part of the reason pest infestations are so difficult to treat for the average homeowner is because there are so many ways things can go wrong. Most homeowners probably aren't used to dealing with squirrel infestations and don't know the inadvertent risks they might be taking, so it's important to know what not to do in order to avoid making the situation worse.

Here are four of the biggest mistakes to avoid when dealing with your squirrel problem:

1. IMPROPER SEALING

When it comes to squirrels, the costliest mistake you can make as a homeowner is failing to properly seal the holes that squirrels are using to get into your home. Even after all of the squirrels currently in the house are removed, if the entry points they originally used remain, it's only a matter of time before the next group of squirrels - or something worse - moves in.

As detailed in the previous section, the only way to keep a squirrel out of your home for good is to seal the hole with something they can't chew through.

Whatever methods you use, once the squirrels are gone, you want to keep them from ever getting back in. Unfortunately, it can be difficult if not impossible for the average homeowner to ensure that his or her home is completely squirrel-free prior to sealing up the holes, which often leads to...



2. TRAPPING SQUIRRELS INSIDE

While getting every hole in your home sealed is paramount, take care not to inadvertently trap squirrels inside in the process. Otherwise, either the squirrels will find (or create) another way out, or you'll find yourself with an attic full of dead squirrels.

Before you seal off any holes, try performing the "newspaper trick": ball up some newspaper pages and stuff it into the suspected entry point and leave it for two days. If the newspaper is still intact after two days, that probably means that any squirrels that might have been using this entrance have left, making it safe to seal. If the newspaper is ripped, pushed to the side, or otherwise tampered with, it's a very good indication that squirrels are still inside.

3. USING POISON

When it comes to squirrel infestations, poison is almost never a viable solution. Beyond the potential legal ramifications, while there are poisons designed to kill rats and mice, there are no poison baits currently on the market specifically labeled for squirrels.

When homeowners attempt to poison squirrels in their home, typically one of two things will happen: either the poison won't be strong enough to kill the squirrel, or it will kill it slowly, at which point the squirrel will slink off to a solitary corner to die alone, leaving you with squirrel corpses, which are even more difficult to find and remove than live squirrels.

If squirrels are in your home, exclusion through live trapping is always a better practice than extermination through poison.

4. WAITING TOO LONG

The longer you wait to squirrel-proof your home, the higher the likelihood that uninvited guests find their way inside. And once squirrels are inside, the longer you wait to get them out, the more damage they can cause.

Making matters worse, squirrels become a much more difficult pest to treat as the temperatures fall. If squirrels get into your home in November or December, it's a very real possibility that you won't be able to safely remove them until the spring. Taking into account how many babies that could be born during this timeframe, a small infestation can easily snowball out of control if it isn't treated promptly.

IF YOU KNOW OR EVEN SUSPECT THAT YOUR HOME HAS SQUIRRELS, NOW IS THE TIME TO ACT. BUT WHERE TO BEGIN?

How to Safely Remove Squirrels From Your Attic Every Time

While there are a number of great steps you can take, if you want your squirrel problem gone for good, you'll ultimately need to enlist a certified professional pest control specialist for help.

A GREAT PEST CONTROL PROFESSIONAL WILL:

Know all the best strategies for squirrel exclusion

Identify the source of the infestation and locate the entry points squirrels are using to get into your home

Use safe and humane practices for squirrel removal

Have access to industry-specific and customized equipment that homeowners can't get on their own

Save you from having to buy and set your own traps

Ensure that traps are set correctly and placed in optimal locations throughout the home

Monitor squirrel presence as well as bait and trap effectiveness to more accurately determine when all squirrels have been excluded

Take care of cleanup for droppings, carcasses, and other hazardous materials

Save you money by getting the job done right the first time and keeping your home protected from future pest infestations

Are you experiencing a squirrel problem, or afraid that your home might be at risk this winter?

YOUR HOME NEEDS PROTECTION, BUT YOU CAN'T ALWAYS DO IT ON YOUR OWN.

The team at Breda Pest are insect and wildlife experts with the training, equipment, and knowledge to remove your pest problem and prevent it from ever happening again. We use only eco-friendly methods and can put a stop to your pest problem without causing harm to your home or to the environment.

HOW BRED A PEST CONTROL REMOVES INVASIVE WILDLIFE FROM YOUR HOME:

A wildlife control specialist will thoroughly inspect your home for any indicators of pest infestation and assess any damage found

Using the best tools in the industry, your pest control service provider will completely eliminate the infestation and handle all cleaning and sanitation

Your service provider will seal all holes throughout your home and keep pests out in the future

Our team will follow-up with you to ensure that our methods were a success and that your problem has been solved

With the Breda Guarantee, you can rest assured that no matter what your pest chews through, you are always covered

If you are experiencing a wildlife infestation, or think that you might be, check out how Breda can solve your problem by visiting our wildlife control services page, and take back your home today!

REQUEST A CONSULTATION

SOURCES:

How to Keep Squirrels Out of Your Attic

Keep Squirrels Out of Your Attic

Inspect Your Attic

How to Get Rid of Squirrels

Squirrel Population Growth Causing Havoc

Natural History of Gray Squirrels

All About Squirrel Nests

The Ultimate Guide: How to Get Rid of Squirrels
in Your Attic or Home

Pest Identification By Droppings

What is the Best Bait to Trap Squirrels?

Does the Law Allow You to Kill Squirrels?