

— Your Guide To —
DEFENDING YOUR HOME
— Against —
SQUIRRELS



Eastern Grey Squirrel

Southern Flying Squirrel

Size (Adult)

15-21 in

8-11 in

Weight (Adult)

19-20 oz

1.25-3 oz

Appearance & Physical Characteristics

- Fur is gray on the back, white on the underside, and reddish-brown on the head, but variations ranging from all-black to all-white are not uncommon
- Distinctive long, bushy tails
- Large black eyes

- Fur is gray-brown on the back, cream-colored on the underside, and gray on the head
- Flat tail
- Large black eyes
- Rear feet have five claws while front paws only have four
- Loose skin membrane called the patagium extends from front wrist to rear ankles, allowing for gliding

Avg. Lifespan in the Wild

6 years

3-5 years

Behavior

- Build dreys (nests made out of twigs and leaves) in the forks tall trees
- Also known to make nests in abandoned bird nests and woodpecker holes
- Most active in the early morning and in the evening
- Do not hibernate
- One of few species that can descend a tree face-first, they can turn their hind feet backward to support their weight, allowing them to very quickly ascend and descend trees, poles, and other obstacles

- In the wild, make nests in tree cavities or make their own out of foraged leaves
- In buildings, nest in the edges of the attic, in the soffit, or even inside walls
- Also known to take over abandoned woodpecker holes and bird nests, and even nests abandoned by other squirrels
- Generally make nests within 100 yards of a water source
- Strictly nocturnal, with activity peaking just after dusk and just before dawn
- Don't actually fly, but can glide between trees using patagium

Feeding Habits

- Scatter-hoarders, meaning that they will hoard food in caches for future recovery
- Will scour up to 100 acres away from the nest in search of food to hoard
- Diet consists primarily of tree bark, berries, seeds, nuts, and acorns
- Frequently raid bird feeders

- Omnivorous, but more carnivorous than most other squirrels
- Especially fond of hickory nuts and acorns, but will eat berries, fruit, bark, fungus, insects, bird eggs, and even young mice

Mating Habits

- Breeding peaks from December-January and then again from May-June
- Litter size: 1-4
- 44-day gestation period

- Breed twice a year, from February-March and again from May-July
- Litter size: 2-5
- 40-day gestation period



Eastern Grey Squirrel

SCIURUS CAROLINENSIS

If you've lived in Georgia for any period of time, chances are high that you're familiar with Eastern gray squirrels. While almost 300 known species of squirrels exists, these big-eyed, bushy-tailed climbers are the mental image most people get when they hear the word "squirrel."

A common sight across the state, Eastern gray squirrels will scour up to 100 acres from their nests in search of nuts, seeds, and other small foods to hoard. In the wild, these squirrels will make nests (called dreys) out of twigs and leaves in the forks of tree branches, using their expert climbing abilities to quickly traverse trees and other obstacles in search of food.

Unfortunately, the roof, attic, and soffit areas of many homes make perfect nesting grounds for Eastern gray squirrels, especially for females looking to nurse their young.



Southern Flying Squirrel

GLAUCOMYS VOLANS

Due to their nocturnal nature, Southern flying squirrels generally see much less interaction with humans than their bushy-tailed cousins.

The name “flying squirrel” is a bit of a misnomer: they don’t actually fly, but rather use skin flaps that run from their front wrists to their rear ankles, called patagium, to glide from tree to tree. While most glides only cover about 20-30 feet, the patagium enables Southern flying squirrels to glide up to 100 feet if necessary.

While omnivorous like most squirrels, Southern flying squirrels generally fall much more on the carnivorous end of the spectrum. Though they particularly love hickory nuts and acorns, they’ll also hunt insects, steal bird eggs, and even kill and eat young mice.

Why They Invade

While both Eastern gray squirrels and Southern flying squirrels each have two peak mating seasons, they will mate year-round if the conditions are right. This means that both types of squirrels are constantly on the lookout for any safe, sheltered place where they can raise babies.

Squirrels are nesting animals, making makeshift homes out twigs and leaves in tree branches, abandoned bird nests, and generally any other suitable hole they can find. These nests then serve as both a safe place to nurse young and a home base to hoard food.

Unfortunately, the roof, attic, and soffit areas are a trifecta for squirrels: they're protected from the elements, close to food, and warm, making them the perfect nesting and breeding ground.

They're also easy to reach: the Eastern gray squirrel has little trouble using his adept climbing skills to scale the side of the house, while the Southern flying squirrel can simply glide over from a nearby tree.



The Damage They Cause

Squirrels instinctively gnaw on just about anything they can get their claws on, whether it be nuts, bark, or the exterior of your home. Even the smallest opening presents an opportunity for a squirrel, who will gnaw away until minor cracks and gaps become gaping holes.

A squirrel's natural instinct to chew and gnaw through wood and other material is compounded by their tenacity. Rest assured, simply finding and patching an entryway is not enough: they WILL find another entrance, or simply chew through the barrier you've put down, and every hole they make puts your home at risk for roof leaks and water damage.

Of course, the gnawing doesn't stop at the home's exterior. Once inside, squirrels will sharpen their teeth by chewing on electrical wires. In fact, squirrels account for one of the largest causes of house fires, causing up to 30,000 home fires a year.

Unless they're foraging for food, squirrels don't leave the nest, meaning biological factors also come into play. Squirrel droppings carry pathogens that can spread through the house, leading to salmonella, Leptospirosis, and a host of other harmful diseases.

Additionally, any insulation or drywall that comes into contact with droppings must be removed and replaced, meaning that the longer the problem persists, the more costly it will be to fix.



What You Can Do

While the average homeowner usually lacks the resources to fully prevent squirrel infestation, there are a number of steps you can take.

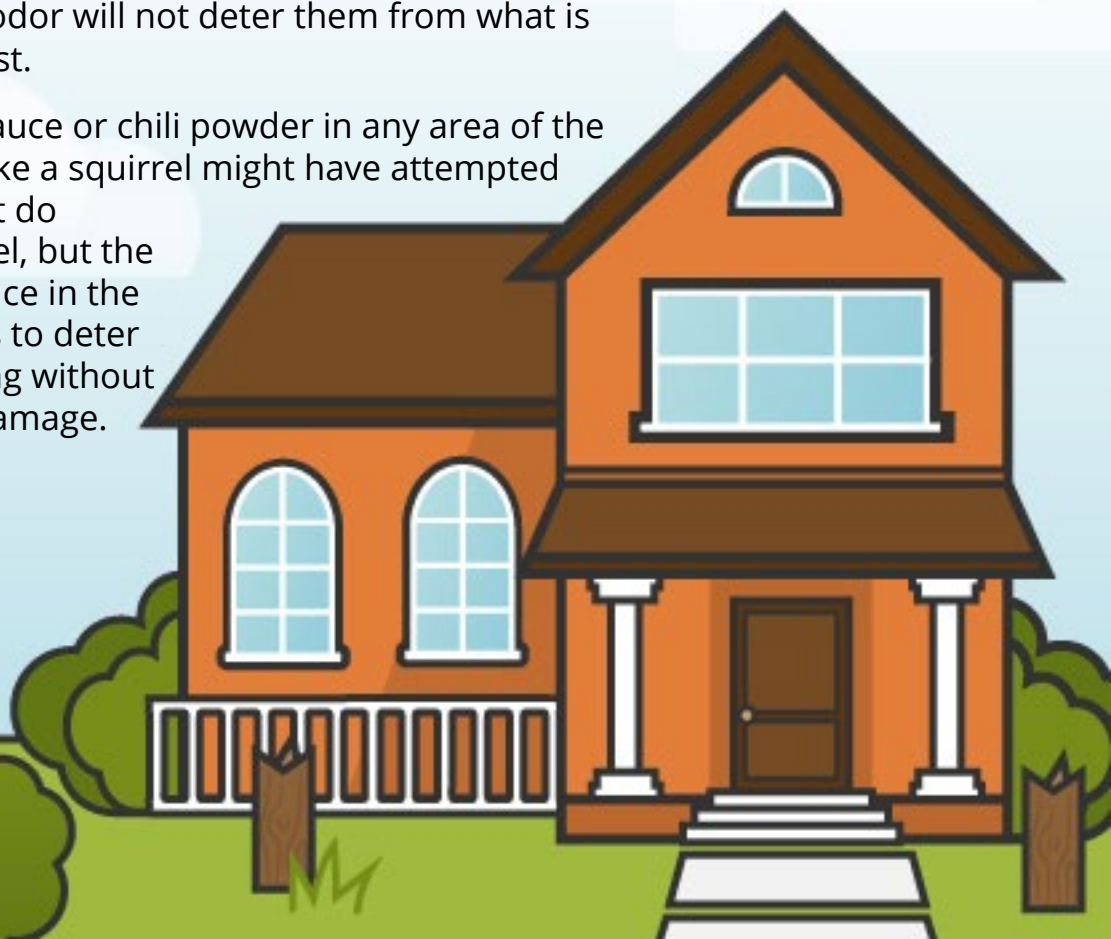
For starters, make sure that trees near your home's roofline are properly trimmed. Squirrels may still be able to climb up to access it, but at least their easiest access route will be cut off.

As an added precaution, after trimming the branches, fasten sheet metal with wire around the trunks of the trees closest to the roofline, preferably with a spring to allow the metal to spread as the tree grows. This will help stop squirrels from getting on the trees closest to the house in the first place, further cutting them off from their easiest access points.

Make sure to check the aforementioned roof, attic, and soffit areas for any potential points of entry, as well as any existing holes or cracks that squirrels might get to. Do your best to seal any potential entryways, but if it becomes apparent that squirrels have gotten inside, it's time to call a professional.

An important side note: DON'T use squirrel repellent sprays. These types of sprays are based on the premise that certain smells will repulse squirrels enough to make them stay away, but that's simply not how it works. Besides the fact that these sprays can be harmful to people and the environment, at the end of the day, squirrels are wild animals looking to find their best chance to survive and breed, and a bad odor will not deter them from what is otherwise a perfect nest.

Instead, sprinkle hot sauce or chili powder in any area of the house where it looks like a squirrel might have attempted entry. Bad smells won't do much to repel a squirrel, but the painful sting of hot sauce in the nostril can do wonders to deter squirrels from returning without doing any long-term damage.



When to Call a Professional

Although you as a homeowner can take a number of preventative measures to keep squirrels from getting into your home in the first place, once they're in, it's time to call a professional.

Depending on the area, the critters in your home might be considered endangered or protected species, so calling a pro might also save you a legal headache down the road.

Once called, a professional will be able to trap the animals if they are inside without killing them so that they can be released back into the wild. A professional will also be able to safely clean up the dangerous waste that might be left behind, and repair damaged areas.

After expelling the unwanted guests, the professional will also be able to seal all the entry points the squirrels have been using, and install a rust-proof galvanized metal flashing around the construction gap on the roofline, keeping them from returning in the future.

After treatment, a professional should do bi-weekly inspections to ensure that the squirrels aren't finding any new ways in that might not be readily apparent to the average homeowner.

