

RUTGERS COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

NEW JERSEY AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION

Tree Squirrels in the Vegetable Garden

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Damage:

Tree squirrels typically feed on many wild fruits and nuts, but during summer they will eat newly planted seed, fruits, berries, and succulent plant materials. Vegetables (especially corn) and cultivated fruit are often removed and eaten by these animals.

Description:

Tree squirrels are a prominent group of squirrels and include Eastern gray squirrels, red squirrels, and flying squirrels. The Eastern Gray squirrels are most variable, some appearing black or with a distinctive reddish cast to their gray coat. Eastern gray squirrels are 16 to 20 inches in length and weigh up to 1-3/4 pounds. Red squirrels are smaller, 10 to 15 inches long, have reddish-brown fur above with white underparts and weigh 1/3 to 2/3 pound.

Life History:

Gray squirrels breed in mid-December and again in June, and can breed when 1 year old. Each litter contains about three young. They nest in tree cavities or leaf nests constructed of dry leaves and sticks.

Home ranges of gray squirrels vary with the season and availability of food, and can cover



Tree Squirrel

from 1 to 100 acres. Squirrels can migrate great distances when overpopulation occurs. The biology of the red squirrel is similar, except that there is only one breeding season per year. Both gray and red squirrels are active during the day.

Control:

Squirrel damage in gardens is difficult to control, and squirrels removed are quickly replaced by new arrivals.

1. Newly-seeded garden plots can be protected by placing 1/4-inch wire mesh cages over seeded areas. Make sure edges are buried several inches into the soil.

2. Methyl nonyl ketone crystals are repellents labeled for border treatments to protect vegetable gardens. Consult and follow label for directions and precautions.

3. Box traps, mouse cage traps and the “Better Squirrel and Rat Traps*” are an effective method of control without harming the squirrel (Fig. 1). A handful of nut meats placed well behind the trigger mechanism will attract the squirrels. For best results, leave baited traps unset for several days to allow squirrels to become accustomed to the trap. After squirrels have become familiar with the trap, rebait and set the triggers. Check traps daily to reduce the time a squirrel might be caged. When handling a cage with a squirrel, take precautions to prevent injury (squirrel bites) to yourself. Use heavy gloves or other precautions. Squirrels are wild animals and may be capable of transmitting diseases, fleas, etc., to humans. Transport squirrels a minimum of 5 miles before releasing or they will very quickly return to the problem area. Try to release them in an area away from homes where they do not cause additional problems. It is illegal to release any trapped wildlife on federal wildlife refuges.

4. Poison baits or rodenticides are not registered or recommended for control.

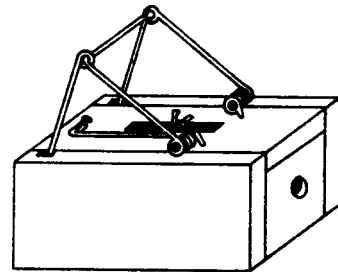
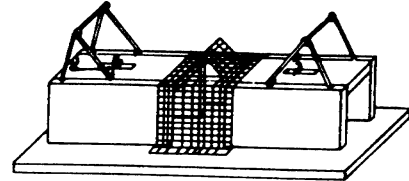
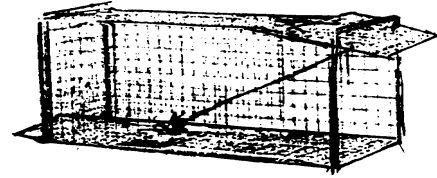


Fig. 1. Top: live animal trap, middle: box-type squirrel trap, bottom: multiple box-type squirrel trap

* Information on brand names in this reference appears with the understanding that no discrimination is intended and no endorsement by RUTGERS COOPERATIVE EXTENSION is implied.