

# Squirrels in Your Belfry??

**This Article Is About Gray Squirrels not Flying Squirrels.**

**First, squirrels are just big rats with cosmetic enhancements.**

## **You have to use live traps**

Forget about poisons, repellants (moth balls are a myth), etc. Rat poison would just have them rotting and smelling in your walls anyway. Don't board up their entry to shut them in or out (they just gnaw new holes). None of these are good enough. A few people use old fashioned spring rat traps (not mouse traps). Others warn if a squirrel trips the trap without being killed or companions see a dead squirrel in the trap they'll shy away from it after that.

You can sometimes borrow live traps from your local pound or SPCA. The downside may be the conditions placed on borrowing. The nearby Home Depot sells them. Many hardware and feed stores sell them and some rent them. We've seen them for sale on EBay.

## **Choosing a Trap**

Some traps that claim to be squirrel traps are too small for gray squirrels. The tails of large gray squirrels sometimes hold the door of smaller traps partly open. This keeps the latch from engaging, thus allowing them to back out and escape. Once trapped, squirrels tend to become "trap shy," and much harder to catch.

**Havahart model 1040** These are harder to find check the internet where you'll find several sites that sell them. These double-door models are for attracting buyers, not squirrels. Single door models catch just as many squirrels. The 1040 will handle larger animals (e.g., cats), and is otherwise the same as the much touted, widely available model 1030.

**Havahart model 1078** Single-door model.

**Tomahawk 204** Two door model.

**The key to success is a well placed trap with good bait.**

## **Bait**

They often find food by smell, so part of your bait should give off an odor they like. Peanut butter is mentioned most in web articles by people who've been successful trapping them. Sometimes it's mixed with oatmeal or molasses. Once they get near enough to see it, cereal, grains, nuts (especially peanuts) sunflower seeds, shelled corn, popcorn and apples have visual and taste appeal.

Instructions on baiting the trap. Place a glob (teaspoon?) of peanut butter directly on the trigger or "treadle". Put some peanut butter on a piece of bread, pinch off a small piece and put it outside but near the mouth of the trap for chum (attractant). You may want to press a small piece of white bread onto the peanut butter as a visual cue.

## **Trapping Tips**

Basically you want to put the trap along their pathways or at their entry points. If you don't know where these are, put it near where they feed, or where you see them.

When you trap one it may go into a fury trying to get out. Be careful handling the trap with a

squirrel in it -- you don't want to get bitten. Heavy work gloves are probably a good idea, and keep you fingers as far as you can from the main cage body.

### **I've Caught 'im, What Now?**

If you are considering carrying them off somewhere and letting them go, one experienced professional says, "I've seen squirrels return from a 25 mile trip. I think that's unusual, but it's a sign of what they can do sometimes. Squirrels trapped from inside a house, when released, ordinarily head for someone else's house, rather than the woods."

If you still plan to relocate them, put some newspaper over a plastic garbage bag in the trunk or wherever you put the trap. They're frightened and tend to . . . uh . . . soil your car.

### **Stopping it from Happening Again**

Once you remove the squirrels you have to close their entry points. You may not want to remove them before locating their entries so you can watch their activity to locate their holes. Entry points are often in trim and at the bottom corners of roofs near the ends of soffits. Examine trim and soffits all around. If they find a small opening in a piece of trim they can gnaw it into an entry hole in minutes. Check aluminum roof ventilators. They can quickly chew through aluminum screening.

Squirrels enter the house through the soffit at roof level, then into the attic, and began removing insulation from the walls. They can fit through anything they can get their head through. Once inside, their curiosity drives them to explore.

If you don't have a chimney trap it's an invitation.

Staple half-inch galvanized hardware cloth (coarse steel wire screening) over all entry points before covering them with cosmetic trim -- it'll stop them from gnawing through that place again.

If they were there for a long time (2 years?) they will have left smells that will attract more squirrels for a couple of years so be vigilant. Repellants may be useful to discourage their return.

Good luck, you may need it.

**These helpful squirrel tips are brought to you by your friendly neighborhood realtors.**

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