



# Squirrels

## Description and habitat

Fox Squirrel, Aberts squirrel, and the Pine squirrel all call Colorado their home. The most commonly seen squirrel in Thornton is the Fox Squirrel. For the most part they are unsociable and aggressive towards other squirrels, as well as being extremely territorial. The fox squirrel has rusty red fur, a very bushy tail, and weighs about 2 pounds. It lives in neighborhoods where there are plenty of trees. Squirrels will build their nests in the crevices of old trees or branches, or in attics if the opportunity arises, and they will use just about anything for the nest...leaves, plastic wrap, clothing, wire, insulation - you name it, they got it!

## Behavior

Squirrels are active during the day year round. They eat nuts, flowers, berries, leaves and seeds of all kinds, and will harvest as many as they possibly can. They will hide them by burying them in the ground, and when they get hungry they go back to one of the stash piles and eat. They are sometimes forgetful about where they buried these stashes of seeds, which can lead to unintended but beneficial tree or shrub growth.

Squirrels give birth two times a year, once in spring (January – April), and then again in the fall (August – September). Their gestation period is approximately 5 weeks, and they give birth to 2-6 pups per litter. The pups are born naked and blind, but leave the nest in search of their own territory within approximately 12-14 weeks. Typically in the wild, the life of a squirrel is anywhere from 4-7 years.

## Benefits

Squirrels are responsible for much of the plant growth from their forgotten and discarded seeds. They are also highly intelligent and agile, and can be a source of amusement if you've ever taken the time to watch their antics.

## Common Problems and Solutions

We are frequently asked about trapping and relocating squirrels away from their home range. This is merely a short term solution which can cause long term problems for the homeowner. By opening up a territory, you are allowing more squirrels to compete for the available resources,

and litter sizes can increase. The best solution is to alter the habitat so the existing squirrel population stays stable, but doesn't cause problems for the homeowner.

## Squirrels in bird feeders

You can rest assured that if you have a bird feeder, you are also attracting the squirrels. If you must have a bird feeder, try placing the feeder at least 8 to 10 feet from the tree trunk, and make sure it has not been placed under anything that will allow the squirrel to jump or climb to the feeder. You can try suspending the bird feeder from a wire, or buy a squirrel-proof bird feeder. If your feeder is on a pole, you can try spreading Vaseline on the pole so the squirrels can't climb up it. Squirrels chewing on trees or other objects – You can try using a commercial product such as Ropel to spray on trees or other objects the squirrel may be chewing on. Make sure that you do not spray this on fruits or vegetables, as it is very bitter. You can also make your own repellent by mixing cayenne pepper and water, or Tabasco sauce and water. You can try planting your bulbs in a coating of cayenne pepper if they are digging them up.

## Squirrels in attics

Squirrels in the attic are a very common problem. First make sure that the squirrels have left the attic before closing up their entry/exit holes. You can convince them to leave by making a lot of noise during the day. Place a radio tuned to a talk show up in the attic space, and shine lights up there if possible. You can also tie rags into tight



knots, soak them in ammonia, then place them up in the attic space. The adult squirrels will leave if their space becomes uncomfortable. If there are babies up there, it might take the mother a little while to move them, but she should be able to relocate them within a day or two. Once the squirrels have left, block their entry/exit hole using hardware cloth secured tightly. You can also spray the entry area with Tabasco sauce mixed in water to discourage them from trying to chew their way back in. If possible, trim back all tree branches that might give the squirrel access to your roof. **MAKE IT SO IT IS UNCOMFORTABLE FOR THEM WITHOUT HURTING OR HARMING THEM IN ANY WAY!**

## Squirrels in chimneys

If a squirrel is down in your chimney, there is the definite possibility that it may not be able to get back out on its own. You can drop a thick rope or cloth tied into knots down the chimney from the top, making sure it goes down all the way to the bottom and is securely fastened at the top. If the squirrel has fallen down into the fireplace, the easiest solution is to close off all doors in the house and open a nearby door or window. You can then open the fireplace door or screen so that the squirrel can exit the fireplace and go out through the house. They are very good about heading towards the light, so make sure it is daylight out when you do this. You can also try this method if the squirrel is in the chimney – just open the flue and give the squirrel a chance to come down into the fireplace and exit the house. Make sure that you check the cap or screen at the top of your fireplace so that other animals cannot enter into the fireplace in the future.

