



TEXAS A&M FOREST SERVICE

Injury to Trees from Animals:

Squirrels & Other Small Animals

Squirrels, voles, rabbits, and porcupines can be tree pests and can cause serious wounds that damage and kill trees. These small animals feed on tree fruit and nuts, tree roots and root bark, leaf buds, tender newly developed leaves, small tender twigs, and the inner bark of tree trunks and branches.



Damage:

- *Feeding on tree fruit and nuts* reduces the amount for human consumption, and can cause minor damage to the tree when small branches are broken during the feeding process.
- *Feeding on tree roots and root bark* can cause serious damage if the tree is newly planted or becoming established. If too much root bark is removed, the roots will be girdled and die. If too many roots die or are eaten, the tree will not be able to take up water and nutrients and will die.
- *Feeding on leaf buds, tender newly developed leaves, and small tender twigs* can cause serious damage if the tree is small and has very few branches. When leaves, leaf buds, or twigs are snipped off, the new growth will split into two new branches and cause poor branching structure in the future. When too many leaves are removed, the tree will not be able to photosynthesize and feed itself. This can result in slowed growth and possible tree death.
- *Feeding on the inner bark of tree trunks and branches* can cause serious damage if the bark is removed in large quantities or completely around the tree trunk or branch (girdling). Removing large portions of bark creates wounds that may not seal (compartmentalize) and causes susceptibility to entry of insects and diseases. Girdling inhibits the tree's ability to transport water and nutrients from the roots to the leaves, and results in tree death. Thin barked trees and younger tree branches are more likely to be damaged as they are easier to chew through.

Control Options:

- *Trapping or shooting* is an option for small animal control. Check with Texas Parks and Wildlife to find out if it is legal in your area.
- *Birds of prey decoys*, such as owls or hawks purchased from your local farm and garden store, placed around your trees may deter small animals from coming near the tree. Also, providing raptor perches for live owls and hawks to have a vantage point for hunting around your trees will reduce small animal populations.
- *Repellents* can be another option for preventing small animal damage to trees. Visual repellents, made of brightly colored or shiny materials, such as pie plates, can be hung in or around the trees and may scare animals away. Odor and taste repellents, such as predator urine, garlic and pepper oils, and mint or wintergreen oils, can be applied onto or around tree trunks and branches and can prevent animals from coming close to the tree and chewing into the bark.
- *Fencing or tree cages* will keep out rabbits. Use small gauge wire, such as chicken wire, to ensure they cannot pass through.
- *Wire and aluminum flashing enclosures* placed around the tree trunk and lower branches will keep squirrels and porcupines from climbing into the tree if it is open grown and access cannot be gained from a surrounding tree or structure.
- *Toxicants*, such as rodenticides, are an option for controlling voles from eating tree roots and root bark. Caution must be used to avoid poisoning children, pets, and nontarget animals. They can be purchased from most stores that carry pesticides and come in bait form. They are placed in the ground around the tree roots and kill voles upon consumption.

