

## **Some Interesting Facts About Our Gray Squirrels**

Fall is approaching and cute furry little creatures are scurrying around yards, parks, and acreage with their cheeks puffed up with nuts. Gray squirrels abound here preparing food and shelter for the winter.

The squirrel's food of choice in the fall is quite a wide variety, including (but not limited to): acorns, hickory nuts, black walnuts, Osage orange seed, grapes, maple seed, dogwood seed, chinquapin, magnolia pine seed, fungi, corn seed, horn bean, pecans, black gum, blackberry, and bark – just to name a few.

Besides foraging for food, squirrels need to prepare their habitat for the cold weather ahead. They bury their nuts and miraculously remember where they buried them. Interestingly, sometimes they put them in neat rows according to size or kind.

It is interesting and helpful to know the habits of the gray squirrel. Squirrels get most of their water needs from dew on leaves or in their food. They live for approximately 6 years and are generally solitary rodents. Because they are rodents, their teeth continue to grow. Thus, they need to gnaw on nuts and bark to keep their teeth size in check. They have two litters of babies, one in early spring and one in mid-summer.

They need snags, hollow logs, or branches to burrow in the winter. If winter protection is not available, they will find ways to enter attics. There they nest and chew on wires to appease their growing teeth – this is when the real nuisance starts. At that point, it may be wise to call the local wildlife agency to help remove them.

Squirrels run fast and climb vertically. They grip hard with sharp, strong claws, thus allowing them to even scurry downward.

In years past, they were sometimes kept as pets. Therefore, gray squirrels can co-exist with humans. They will not harm people unless they feel threatened. However, they do carry fleas and ticks that cause diseases to humans, namely Lyme disease and Rocky Mountain spotted fever.

Gray squirrels usually take up residence in large nut trees and build their nests with twigs and leaves called drays. They will nest in a tree for a few years before vacating to another. Then, another squirrel will move in its place. This can result in many years of squirrels in one tree. Squirrels are territorial, so there will never be an abundance of them nesting in one tree.

The best way to live peaceably with squirrels is to know they just want to eat, shelter, and raise their young just like we do. If some garden fruit and vegetables are eaten by squirrels, this may be the price to pay for peaceful co-existence.

**Some related OSU fact sheets:**

[Wildlife Management Notes: Gray and Fox Squirrels](#)

[EPP-7001 \(Common Ticks of Oklahoma and Tick-Borne Diseases\)](#)

[NREM-2897 \(Managing for Small Mammal Diversity\)](#)

[NREM-9026 \(FAQs for Wildlife Damage & Disease\)](#)