

Improving Gray Squirrel Habitat on Private Woodlands

Gray squirrels are the residents of the extensive forests of the northern Lower Peninsula and the Upper Peninsula, along with red squirrels and flying squirrels. Fox squirrels are inhabitants of the woodlots of southern Michigan.



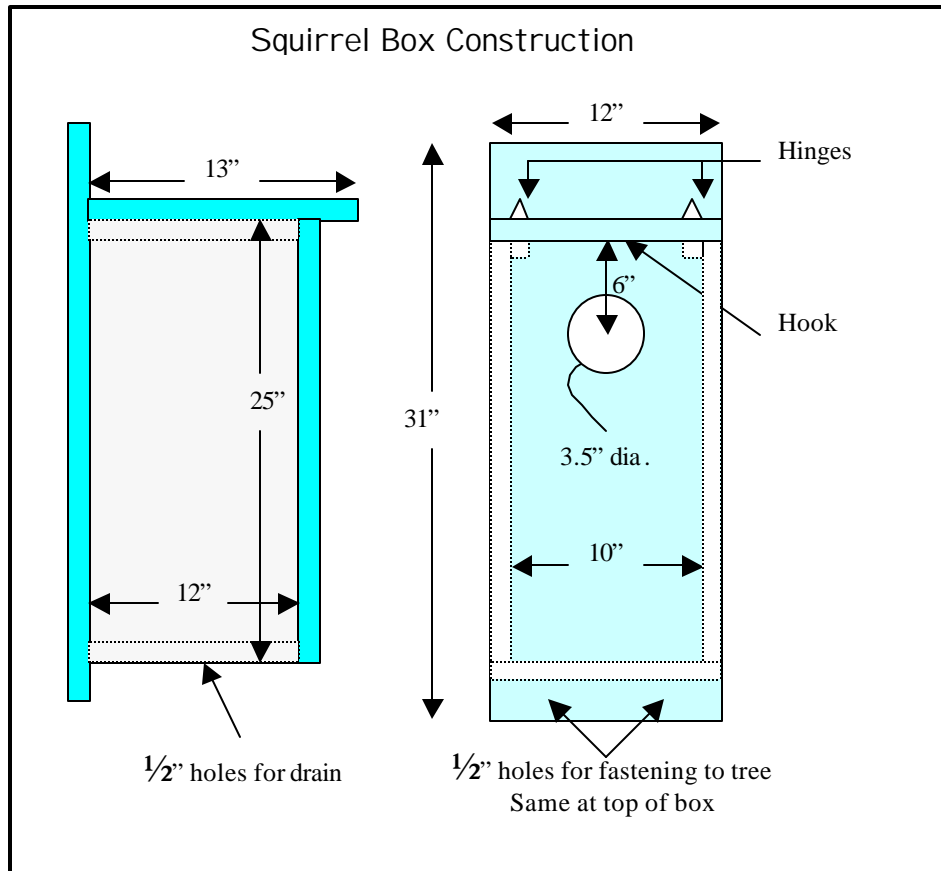
- 1) Manage mixed stands of deciduous trees to maintain and encourage those trees that produce nuts, fruits or seeds that gray squirrels prefer (oaks, maples, beech, and others).



Management practices may include thinning, group selection cutting, and planting. Whenever any tree cutting is done, remember that large trees with hollow trunks and limbs provide dens for squirrels (and other animals). If possible, leave 1-2 of these large den trees per acre. If you have a choice between leaving a nut producing den tree (e.g. oak, beech) and a tree that does not produce nuts, leave the nut producing den tree and cut the non-producing tree. Consult a professional forester or wildlife biologist for the most appropriate methods.

- 2) When clearcutting forest stands of oak-aspen or oak-pine, leave some oaks uncut, preferably standing in clumps. Scattered trees are more vulnerable to a variety of hazards. Consult a professional forester or wildlife biologist for the most appropriate methods.
- 3) Plant or encourage fruit producing shrubs growing on woodland edges or in woodland openings.
 - a) Plant a variety of species so that fruit is available from late spring to late winter – crabapples, hawthorns, dogwoods, viburnums, buffaloberry, wild grape, bittersweet, bush honeysuckles, autumn olive, etc.
 - b) Shrubs will probably need mouse, rabbit and deer guards in order to quickly grow beyond vulnerable size (more than 5 ft. tall and 3 inches in diameter).
 - c) To encourage plants already growing, cut away competing woody plants, thin and prune if necessary, and fertilize.

- 4) If corn is produced on land adjacent to your woodlands, leave 1-3 rows of standing corn on the edge of the woods.
- 5) If your woodland contains young nut producing trees that have few natural den sites, consider building artificial nest boxes for squirrels. The following design is easy to build and erect. Adding nest boxes to woodlands with large, old, hollow trees is ineffective.



Dimensions shown above are approximations. Rough-cut 12-inch boards are ideal for construction of artificial dens. Nest boxes should be securely wired with to trunks of non-commercial trees in woodlots or fencerows. They should be placed about 25 feet from the ground.

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