

## Ground squirrel invasion

Squirrels divert purpose of our newspaper's community garden

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THE GROUND squirrels are coming! The ground squirrels are coming!

I should have known strings (more like ropes) were attached when Home & Garden editor Joan Morris asked me to help her keep "some" squirrels from eating the vegetables in the Our Garden project.

We agreed only humane methods could be used, and squirrels couldn't be hurt.

There was only one little problem. Joan didn't tell me they'd planted Our Garden right in the middle of a ground squirrel colony.

I figured because Our Garden was an experimental garden, this was a good opportunity to test a few of the many animal repellents on the market. I stopped by Ace Hardware where I live in Benicia and nearby Home Depot in Vallejo and gathered an armload of a rather eclectic collection of squirrel repellents. Joan also had some samples she'd received in the mail.

And then the fun began.

I had seven repellent brands and tried each for two to three days, or until the container was empty.

Our Garden has planted three large plots with pathways running between each plot. When testing repellents, I sprinkled or sprayed them as directed on the pathways and in 2-foot swaths around the plot perimeters.

Here are my results:

Critter Ridder: Repels skunks, groundhogs, dogs, cats, squirrels and raccoons.

Active ingredients: Oil of black pepper, piperine, capsaicin and related capsaicinoids, other ingredients;

Directions: Lightly sprinkle granules on lawns, garden paths and flower beds. "This product repels by odor and taste."

Results: This was the most effective — for the first couple of days. Then it was as if the ground squirrels all came charging in holding their noses and forgot the stuff was there. It might have been more effective in dealing with fewer squirrels, or maybe in the confines of a backyard.

Shotgun Repels-All Animal Repellent Granules: Repels armadillos, beavers, birds, cats, crows, chipmunks, deer, dogs, groundhogs, porcupines, rabbits, raccoons, rats, skunks, shrews, and squirrels.

Active ingredients: Dried blood, putrescent whole egg solids, garlic oil, other ingredients; [www.bonide.com](http://www.bonide.com).

Directions: Sprinkle a band, 6 to 8 inches wide next to and around the area you wish protected. Repels by touch, taste or smell.

Results: It didn't even slow them down.

Shake-Away Rodent Repellent Granules: Can be used for rodents, mice, rats, voles, shrews, squirrels and chipmunks.

Active ingredients: Mint oil. Inert ingredients, calcium carbonate, urea, water; [www.shake-awayproducts.com](http://www.shake-awayproducts.com).

Directions: Apply granules in and around areas where animals are causing damage, or in areas you want to protect.

Results: Ground squirrels apparently like the smell of mint. It didn't work.

Shake-Away Fox Urine Granules: Can be used for small creatures — rabbits, gophers, groundhogs, possums, porcupines and woodchucks.

Active ingredients: Fox urine.

Directions: Apply only to perimeter of where food plants are grown.

Results: Fox urine doesn't seem to bother them. Or maybe city ground squirrels don't know what a fox is.

Messina Wildlife's Squirrel Stopper: Used for squirrels.

Active ingredients: Putrescent whole egg solids, mint oil, cinnamon oil, rosemary oil, others. Inert ingredients, Xanthan gum, water; [www.messinawildlife.com](http://www.messinawildlife.com).

Directions: Apply a fine mist to plants that need protecting. (I just sprayed a 2-foot wide area around all the plots.)

Results: It didn't work.

Liquid Fence Deer & Rabbit Repellent: Repels deer and rabbits.

Active ingredients: Putrescent egg solids, garlic, sodium lauryl sulfate, potassium sorbate. Other ingredients, water, Xanthan gum; [www.liquidfence.com](http://www.liquidfence.com).

Apply liberally to plants and their perimeter. (I sprayed a 2-foot barrier.)

Results: Yes, it says only rabbits and deer, but I was desperate at this point. As you probably guessed, it didn't work, either.

Apple cider vinegar: Several of my column readers recommended spraying vinegar around potted plants to keep squirrels from digging in them.

Results: It didn't work. This may be a case of something working on individual squirrels, but not on a whole colony. Backyard squirrels are fox squirrels, which may be more sensitive to vinegar than ground squirrels.

This may also be the reason the above commercial repellents didn't work on the ground squirrels.

As Joan reported in a story July 18, on the advice of Gary Beeman, a Lafayette biologist and expert in solving wildlife problems, Our Garden volunteers installed special new fencing to keep the squirrels out of the garden.

While this was going on, I tossed mothballs down the ground squirrel holes, also advised by Beeman, to encourage them to relocate away from the area.

To date, it seems to be working. Being a cynical animal columnist, I'll reserve judgment, or as they say in TV Land — film at 11.