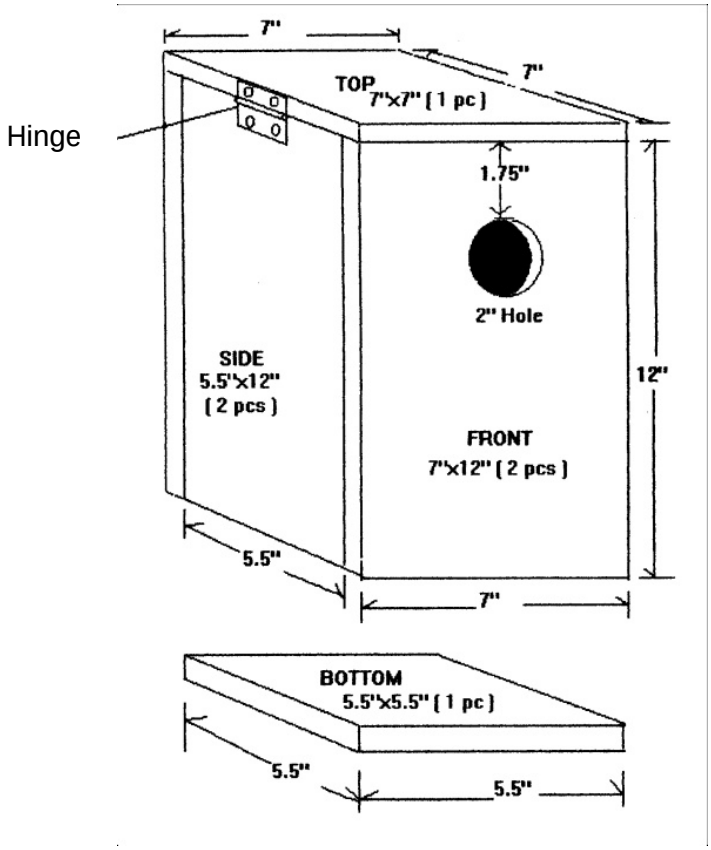
Building Squirrel Boxes

By Jim Isaacs

If you enjoy a small project that can bring the satisfaction of a job well done, building a squirrel box might be for you. Not only will it give you a sense of accomplishment, but it can also provide a much-appreciated intermediate home for a squirrel in rehab.

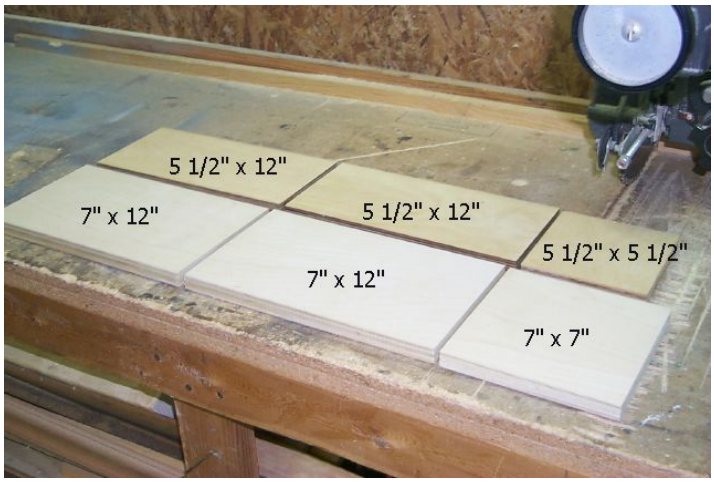
The box is designed to be easily moved from a small weaning cage to a larger pre-release cage. It is not for hanging in trees. The hinged lid allows easy capture for feeding or examination. The box may be set on the floor of the cage or moved up the side as climbing skills develop.

The plans and instructions below are intended as guidelines. You do not have to follow the directions implicitly, as squirrels are not particular when it comes to the quality of their dwelling. As they grow, they will gnaw out the entrance hole to meet their needs, resulting in a somewhat less than beautiful box. Do not paint or apply any finish to the box, as it may be toxic to the animal. Do not use treated lumber.



Materials needed:
- Small piece of scrap ¾ inch plywood.
- Small box of 4d finishing nails
- Small hinge with screws
- Two 8d or 10d nails (to be used as hooks)

Tools needed:
- Bench saw (recommended) or circular saw
  (If you don't have a power saw, you might have a friend who does)
- Hammer and screw driver
- Electric Drill with 1/16" bit
- 2" hole saw
- Tape measure or ruler and pencil



Step 1: Mark your plywood and cut into pieces as shown. What works best is to rip cut the plywood into 2 pieces (one 7" wide and the other 5 ½" wide). Then cross cut those pieces into sections as shown.
You should end up as follows:

2 pieces 12" x 5 ½" (sides)
1 piece 5 ½" x 5 ½" (bottom)

2 pieces 12" x 7" (front & back)
1 piece 7" x 7" (top or "lid")

Step 2: Begin by nailing the front to the sides. (If you have trouble nailing, you can make it easier by pre-drilling small pilot holes for each nail).

Step 3: Nail the back to the other pieces. Nailing on a solid surface will make the job easier.

Step 4: Tap the bottom (5 ½" x 5 ½" piece) into the hole on one end of the box.

Step 5: Nail the bottom to the box sides.

Step 6: Mount the top piece (lid) to the box with a small hinge. Hold the hinge in position and mark the location of the mounting holes. The hinge may be mounted on the back or either side of the box. Most people prefer the back.

Step 7: Drill small screw starting holes for mounting the hinge.

Step 8: Mount the hinge with the screws. Phillips screws are easier to use.

Almost finished !

Step 9: Mark the center of the hole and drill it out using the 2" hole-saw. The hole should be centered and approximately 2 ¾" down from the top.

The finished box should look approximately like this:

Side hooks may be added to facilitate hanging the box in a wire cage. Simply drive 2 small nails into the sides as shown and bend them over at a 90 degree angle.

Ready For Occupancy

Since smooth Birch plywood was used on this box, it was necessary to score the front of the box slightly for paw holds. Normally, lesser grade plywood would be used, such as “B/C”. This type of wood is rough enough for a squirrel to get a paw hold.

The dimensions of the box are based on the size requirements of the Southern Gray Squirrel in its pre-release stage. If one wanted to house Southern Flying Squirrels, the only modification necessary would be decreasing the size of the entrance hole to a 1” diameter. For larger species of squirrels such as the Fox Squirrel, one could increase the diameter of the entrance hole to 3.5”, as well as increase the overall dimensions of the box.

The other consideration was to find a size that would fit conveniently into the wire cages most of the rehabilitators in our group use. These 18” x 18” x 36” wire cages are used for animals whose eyes are just opening until they are ready to be moved to a larger pre-release cage. The squirrel boxes fit conveniently through the 10" x 10" door.

The hinged lid allows the rehabilitator easy access for inspection and feeding. The box also allows the rehabber to move the animal from the smaller cage to the pre-release cage without changing its “home”. As the animal’s climbing skills develop, the box can be moved up the wire cage walls. When laid on its side, the box allows chipmunks, eyes just opening babies, and injured adults a secure area in which to hide.

Again, this design is a wooden box that <u>is not</u> to be hung in a tree or placed outside in a non-protected area.