

Porcupine Damage?

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AT THE OAKS COUNTRY Club we've had several trees damaged and even killed by what we were led to believe was porcupine damage. Although the porcupine is very rare in this section of the country, a reputable local expert assured us this animal was the culprit.

Since the porcupine is a nocturnal animal, a nighttime hunting routine was established. It had no success. Either our porcupine was very smart, or we were hunting the wrong kind of animal.

The damage occurred strictly on younger pin oaks 12 to 14 feet tall. Over 40 trees were gnawed where limbs were attached to the trunk. Others were completely girdled around the main leader 10 to 15 feet high into the tree. Needless to say, the trees that were completely girdled died at the top.

All the trees that were damaged received prompt attention. Wounds were cleaned of all jagged and torn bark edges. Where possible, a diamond shape cut was made to enhance speedier recovery.

During an inspection of damage one morning, my assistant and I noticed a red squirrel laying on a limb ripping



(Above) Squirrels have been known to bury nuts in greens. And some have been known to steal golf balls.

(Below, left) Porcupine or squirrel damage. How can you tell?

(Below, right) All dead limbs are not caused by lightning, disease, insects or wind damage. A squirrel did this!

the bark off in small strips with his teeth. This answered a lot of questions and immediately acquitted the poor porcupine that never existed.

To solve the problem, I thinned out the population of squirrels on the golf course by using a 410 gauge shotgun when the course was closed. Every safety precaution was taken and I was fully aware of the location of all employees before shooting. All the squirrels were immediately cleaned and frozen by a couple of employees for later consumption.

The reasons for the squirrel's odd behavior were blamed on:

1. Overpopulation.
2. Poor acorn and hickory nut crop the previous year.
3. Using the strips of bark for their summer nests.

The population was thinned to over 50 percent. A close watch will be maintained on our trees next year to observe any new damage. Thinning the squirrel population has drastically improved our situation here at the Oaks Country Club. We haven't seen any new porcupines either!

