How to Build an Obstacle Course For Squirrels

JohVonna Darrington

Jonathan Gardner

Andria Sims

Emily Spivey

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Introduction

Purpose

Whether you are trying to keep squirrels out of your bird feeders or just looking for some backyard amusement, a squirrel obstacle course can be an inexpensive and entertaining project. You can watch squirrels scramble across rope, leap from obstacle to obstacle, and put their problem-solving skills to the test in pursuit of a tasty prize. This guide will help you construct a basic obstacle course for the free-roaming squirrels near your home. These instructions are just a starting point: you can make your obstacle course as simple or elaborate as your space and your budget allow; and if you (or the squirrels) start to get bored, you can rearrange the course to make it new again.

Before You Start

Size of the location

These instructions cover a 20'x20' area; however, you can easily adjust the size by adding more obstacles to make it larger or eliminating one or more obstacles to make it smaller.

Squirrel population

When planning the obstacle course and filling the feeder, consider the number of squirrels that inhabit the area in and around the location of the obstacle course. Allow more space and more obstacles (and more squirrel snacks) for densely populated areas. Likewise, you can use less space and fewer obstacles in sparsely populated areas.

<u>Cost of materials</u>

Carefully consider your budget and how much you want to spend on this project. The more elaborate the course, the more you will spend on materials; so, before you begin planning your obstacle course, research the cost of materials in your area.

<u>Skills and Experience</u>

This manual assumes basic carpentry/woodworking skills.

Safety Precautions

Recommended safety equipment:

- Work gloves
- Safety goggles
- Hard hat
- Steel-toed boots

Always use caution when operating machinery or tools of any kind.

Obstacles in Course

1. Bell Line
2. Plexiglass Run
3. Pinwheel
4. Slide
5. Pole Climb
6. Feeder

Chapter One

Supplies

Source: Squirrel Warfare, 2008: http://curlygrrl.wordpress.com/category/home/gardens/squirrels/

Materials

Bell Line

- Rope (4ft)
- Bells (4)
- String (1ft)
- 5' Support Post (1)

Plexiglass Run

- Plexiglass Square (2)
- Rope (12ft)
- 5' Support Post (2)

Pinwheel

- Bolt (1)
- Nut (1)
- Washer (1)
- Ears of Corn (4)
- 1x1 Plank (4)
- 2x4 Plank (1)
- 5' Support Post (1)

Slide

- 6x1 Smooth Sheet Metal (1)
- 4x2x1 Plank (2)
- 4' Support Post (1)
- 5' Support Post (2)
- 6' Support Post (1)

Pole Climb

- 2x1 Plank (3)
- Nail (9)
- 7' Support Post (1)

Feeder

- Squirrel Feeder (1)
- 2x4 Plank (1)
- 6' Support Post (1)

Additional Materials

- Squirrel food
- Flags

Tools

- Hammer
- Wood Saw
- Power Drill
- Mallet
- Nails (200)
- Tape Measure

Chapter Two

Building the Course

Source: Into the Air, 2011: http://www.backyardchirper.com/blog/some-bird-feeders-are-no-match-for-acrobatic-squirrels/

Mapping Out the Course

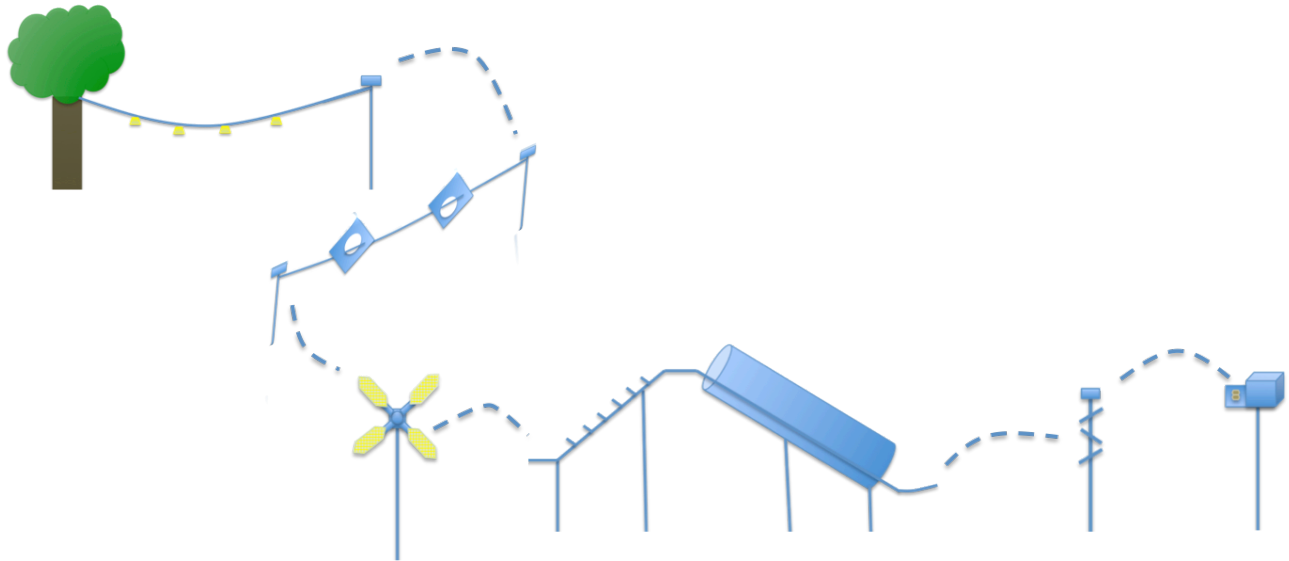A suggested course is depicted in Diagram 1:

Diagram 1

1. Locate an ideal spot to set up the squirrel obstacle course.
2. Gather materials for all obstacles you will include in your course.
3. Choose a starting point for the course, and mark it with a flag.
   Note: A tree makes a great starting point, because it is a natural habitat for squirrels, and you can use the tree as a post for some obstacles, such as the bell line.
4. Use the flags to plot out the placement of the obstacles in your obstacle course. Obstacles should be four to five feet apart, and they should lead the squirrel to the feeder.
5. Construct obstacles using the following instructions.

Building the Course Obstacles

Bell Line

1. Tie one end of the 4-foot rope around a tree.
2. Use the mallet to drive the support post into the ground, about three feet from the tree.
3. Bring the other end of the rope around the top of the post so that the rope hangs loosely, and secure the rope by nailing it to the post using a hammer and nail.
4. Use the hammer and a nail to secure a 2x4 ledge directly onto the center of the top of the pole.
5. Tie the four bells evenly along the rope line using the string.

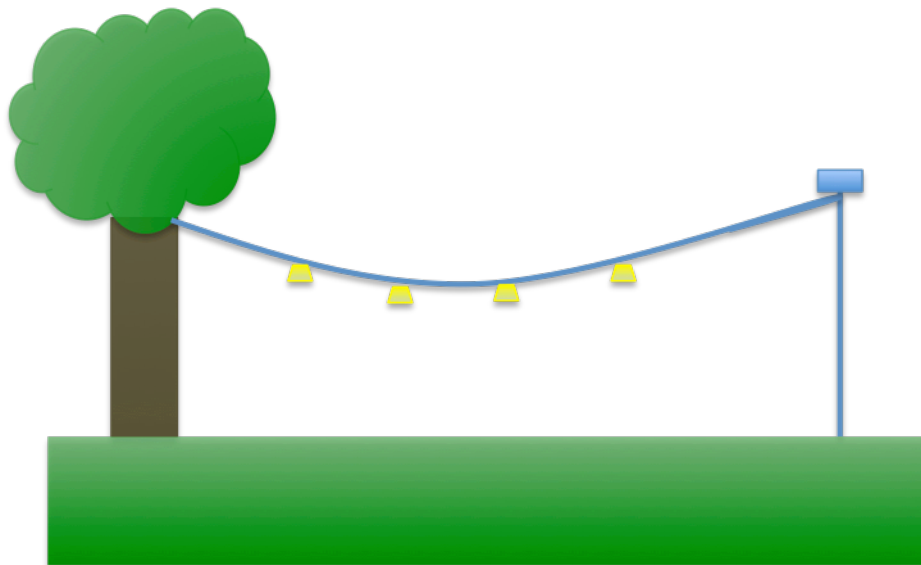Your bell line should resemble the obstacle in diagram 2:

Diagram 2

Plexiglass Run

1. Use the mallet to drive the support posts into the ground, 10 feet apart.
2. Use the hammer and a nail to secure a 2x4 ledge directly onto the center of the top of both poles.
3. Slide the 12 foot rope through the small hole in the plexiglass rectangle with the downward hole, and position the plexiglass so that it rests roughly two-thirds down the length of the rope.
4. Tie a knot in the rope on each side of the plexiglass obstacle.
5. Slide the long end of the rope through the plexiglass rectangle with the upwards hole, and position the plexiglass so that it rests roughly one-third down the length of the rope.
6. Bring the end of the rope around the first pole, and secure it into place with a nail.
7. Bring the other end of the rope around the second pole and secure it into place with a nail.

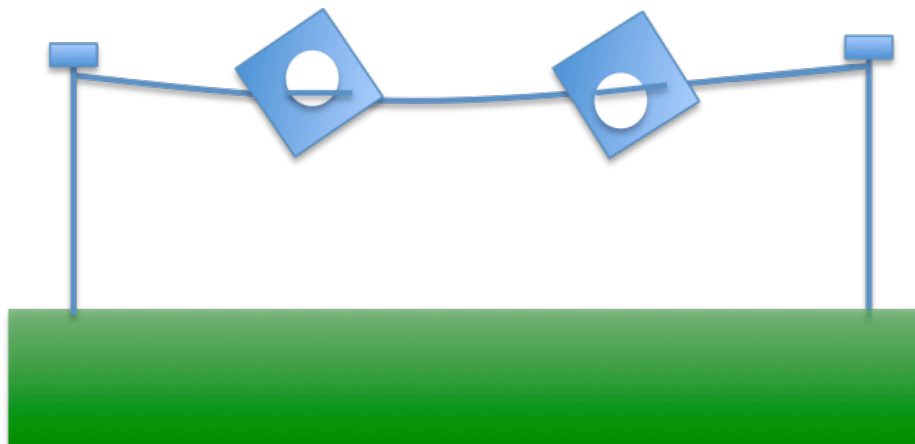Your plexiglass run should resemble the obstacle in Diagram 3:

Diagram 3

Pinwheel

1. Use the mallet to drive the support post into the ground.
2. Place the circular wooden piece directly in the center of the 2x4 plank.
3. Use the power drill to bore through the center of the circular wooden piece.
4. Put the bolt through the front end and twist the nut on the back end of the bolt loosely so that the circular wooden piece may still spin.
5. Sharpen one end of each of the 1x1 planks to a thin sharp point.
6. Line up the unsharpened base of one of the 1x1 planks on the side of the circular wooden piece, and secure it by angling a nail through the top of the circular wooden piece through the 1x1 plank and hammering it in.
7. Repeat step 5 to attach the other three 1x1 planks to the circular wooden piece so that they form a cross.
8. Attach the ears of corn by stabbing the base of the corn with the sharpened end of the wooden planks.
9. Attach the entire pinwheel assembly to the wooden post using nails and a hammer.

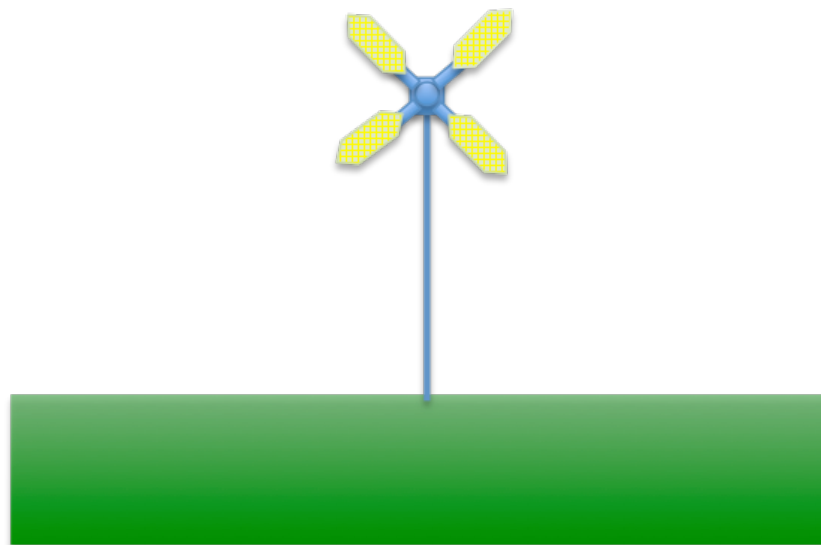Your pinwheel should resemble the obstacle in Diagram 4:

Diagram 4

Slide

1. Use the mallet to drive the support posts into the ground in the following order:
   a. 5' post
   b. 6' post, 2 feet from post in step a.
   c. 5' post, 4 feet from post in step b.
   d. 4' post, 4 feet from post in step c.
2. Attach the 2x4 ledges directly on top of the first two posts using a hammer and nails.
3. Use the wood saw to angle the edges of the 2.5' 2x4 plank so that its side profile is a trapezoid that fits between the first two posts.
4. Secure the 2.5' 2x4 plank between the first two poles using a hammer and nails.
5. Use the wood saw to cut a 2x4 into six sections that are each 3 inches long.
6. Use a hammer and nails to evenly space and secure the six partitions along the upwards ramp.
7. Attach the middle of one end of the metal sheet to the top of the second post in the slide using nails and a hammer.
8. Attach the metal sheet to the 5' pole using a hammer and nails.
9. Let the sheet metal naturally curve upwards on top of the 4' pole of the slide. Then secure its position using a hammer and nails.

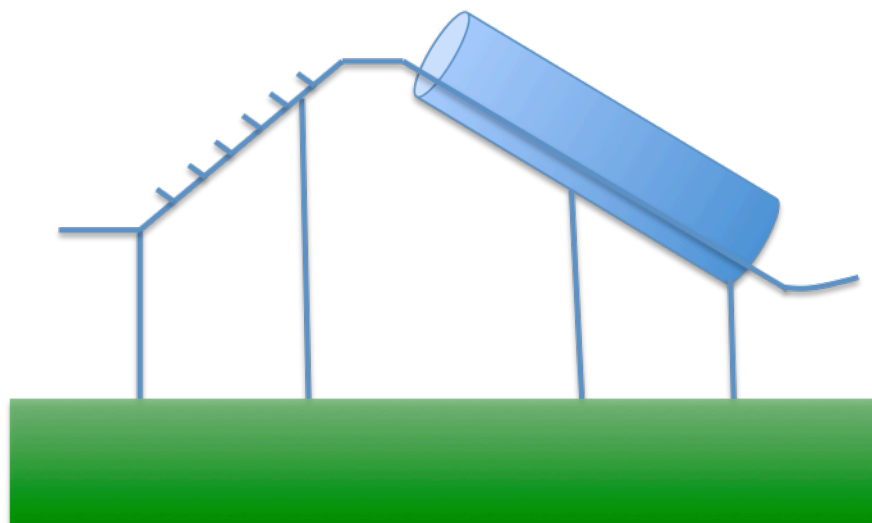Your slide should resemble the obstacle in Diagram 5:

Diagram 5

Pole Climb

1. Use the mallet to drive the support post into the ground.
2. Attach the center of a 2x4 ledge to the top of the post using a hammer and nails.
3. Secure the first step to the side of the pole climb using two nails and a hammer at 4' 6" from the ground, facing the ledge.
4. Nail the other 5 steps to the pole climb in a similar fashion, but rising 6" every step and rotating 1/3 a circle around the pole each time.

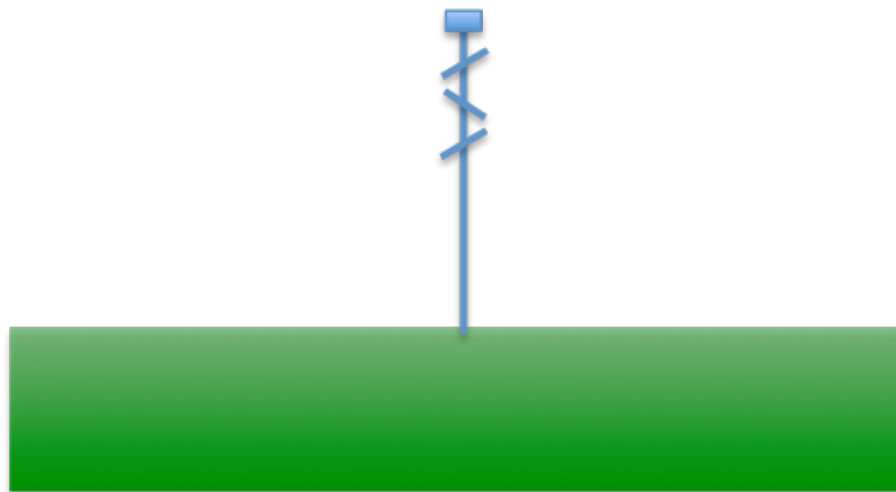Your pole climb should resemble the obstacle in Diagram 6:

Diagram 6

Feeder

1. Use the mallet to drive the support post into the ground.
2. Attach the feeder to the top of the pole using a hammer and nails.
3. Place the food in the feeder.
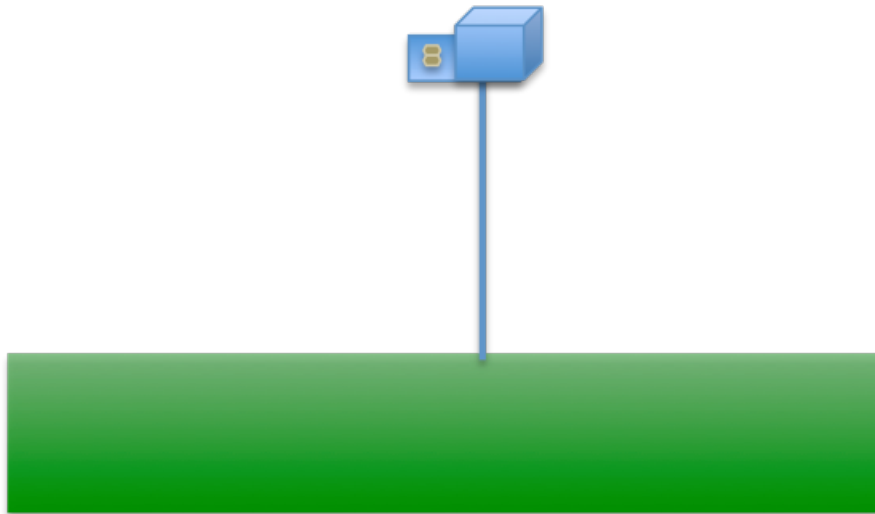
Your feeder should resemble the obstacle in Diagram 7:

Diagram 7

Chapter Three

Troubleshooting

Source: Furry Talk, 2009: http://www.furrytalk.com/2009/05/wanting-to-gossip-squirrel/

Commonly Encountered Issues

This section will address some common issues you may encounter when building a squirrel obstacle course, such as:

- Obstacle course is unbalanced or shaky.
- Squirrels are not interested in running the course.
- Squirrels are shortcutting some obstacles.

Stability Issues

If you are having stability issues, revisit the instructions and make sure you followed each step correctly. If the course is still shaky, you may need to drive the posts in deeper.

Uninterested Squirrels

If the squirrels do not seem interested in following the course, you may need to change what food is offered at the end. Some favorite foods of squirrels include:

- Nuts
- Seeds
- Fruits
- Lichens
- Buds
- Mushrooms
- Roots
- Pine cones

If a particular type of food does not seem to work, try to switch up the food and keep a variety. Leaving food along the course could also help lure the squirrels down the course.

Cheating Squirrels

Squirrels have a medium intelligence level, so they will often learn to reach the food without going through the course. The most common way squirrels can cheat the course is by jumping on the course and bypassing challenging obstacles. If this happens, try raising the vulnerable post a few inches higher

Cheating Squirrels

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