

How To Get Rid Of Gophers -- No Shovel Required

Leimone Waite, Master Gardener, Jan. 25, 2018

Q: I have a resident gopher in my lawn. We're on speaking terms, but unfortunately, I can't write what I have been saying to it. I asked my neighbor for advice and he advised me to stand patiently over the hole with a shovel poised guillotine fashion, and then when my nemesis pokes its head out, to dispatch it underground permanently. I am not sure this would work as I have not seen the gopher, just the mounds that it leaves, and I am not sure I am this bloodthirsty. Do you have a better method of ridding my yard of this pest?



(Photo: oleg_1959, Getty Images/iStockphoto)

A: Some gardeners do have some luck using a garden hose to flood the gopher out and then whacking it with a shovel but this is not the most surefire method of gopher removal. I have had better luck trapping the gopher. There are several types of gopher traps available. The most common type is a two-pronged, pincher trap such as the Macabee, Cinch, or Gophinator, which the gopher triggers when it pushes against a flat, vertical pan. Other types of traps are the choker-style box trap or the black hole type. The key to trapping is to make sure that you set a trap facing each way in the gopher's tunnel and that you find the main tunnel. You can use a probe to find the tunnel between mounds. The UC Integrated Pest Management website has videos showing how to set a Macabee style trap. YouTube also has several good instructional videos on setting a gopher trap.



A mole mound is round. (Photo: Larry L. Strand, UC Statewide IPM Program)

Another common way to rid your site of gophers is to feed them poison bait. Most gopher baits are single feed baits and should only be used underground as they can be very toxic to pets and children. Because it is not common for the gopher to come above ground there is little risk for secondary poisoning to wildlife with gopher baits. The University of California Integrated Pest Management site has a very detailed pest note on gophers. According to this site: "The key to an effective toxic baiting program is bait placement. Always place pocket gopher bait in the main underground tunnel, not the lateral tunnels. After locating the main gopher tunnel with a probe, enlarge the opening by rotating the probe or inserting a larger rod or stick. Following label directions, place the bait carefully in the opening using a spoon or other suitable implement that you use only for that purpose, taking care not to spill any onto the ground. A funnel is useful for preventing spillage."

You may have heard of fumigating the gopher with smoke or gas cartridges, however these usually are not effective, because gophers quickly seal off their burrow when they detect smoke or gas. Fumigation

with aluminum phosphide is effective but not available to the homeowner as it is a restricted use material.



Gopher mounds are more haphazard than mole mounds. (Photo: Jack Kelly Clark, UC Statewide IPM Program)

Before you start waging war with your gopher, do make sure that it is truly a gopher and not a mole. Moles have round mounds and sometimes telltale, just below the surface, tunnels that connect the mounds, while a gopher mound is more fan shaped with a plug in the middle. A gopher's burrow system can cover an area that is 200 to 2,000 square feet and the burrow runs are approximately 3 inches in

diameter. The burrows depth varies; with feeding burrows anywhere from 6 to 12 inches below ground and the nest and food storage chamber up to 6 feet deep. Gophers seal the openings to the burrow system with earthen plugs. Gophers can be active at all hours of the day and don't hibernate during the winter, so they are active all year-round.

To get the pest note for the pocket gopher go to <http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn7433.html>

The Shasta Master Gardeners Program can be reached by phone at 242-2219 or email mastergardener@shastacollege.edu. The gardener office is staffed by volunteers trained by the University of California to answer gardeners' questions using information based on scientific research.