

If There Are Gophers In Your Yard, Follow These Tips To Get Rid Of Them

Leimone Waite, Master Gardener, July 12, 2019



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

Q: I have a gopher leaving dirt mounds all over my lawn. At the rate this gopher is going my lawn is going to be completely destroyed as this beast leaves 3 to 5 mounds each night. I have tried flooding it out with a garden hose to no avail. Do you have any suggestions on how to get rid of gophers?

A: Mounds of fresh soil indicate a gopher's presence. Be sure to confirm the mounds are from gophers and not moles. Many gardeners mistake mole mounds for gophers and this can lead to frustration as moles are controlled a different way than a gopher. Gopher mounds typically are crescent- or horse-shoe-shaped when viewed from above. The hole, which is off to one side of the mound, is usually plugged.

A mole mound will be more circular and have a plug in the middle that might not be distinct; in profile they are volcano-shaped. With moles you may also find a raised ridge to mark their path, in addition to building deeper "main" burrows. This is because moles feed on insect just below the soil surface rather than on plant roots like the gopher. Just one gopher can create several mounds in a day and they like to dig in moist areas such as lawns, flower beds, and gardens. Moles can also be very active in a lawn if there are grubs or other insects to eat.



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

Once you have confirmed you have gophers, I would suggest using either traps or bait. There are several types of gopher traps available. The most common type is a two-pronged, pincer 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 University of California Integrated Pest Management website says "some consider box traps to be easier to use than pincer-style traps for inexperienced gopher trappers. However, setting box traps in the main tunnel requires more surface excavation than the pincer-type traps, which is an important consideration in lawns and some gardens. Most experienced trappers find pincer traps easier to use".

YouTube also has several good instructional videos on setting a gopher trap and locating the tunnels with a probe.

Another common way to rid your site of gophers is to feed them a 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 UC Integrated Pest Management site has a very detailed pest note on gophers. According to it, “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.” When using baits, you should follow label instructions, be careful not to spill any on the soil surface and store in an area locked away from pets and children.

To get the pest note for the pocket gopher go to <https://bit.ly/2JKsZUR>.

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.