GARDEN INFORMATION SERIES

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VERTEBRATE PESTS OF THE GARDEN
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Pests in the garden are not always insects. Small mammals and birds can also cause problems for the vegetable garden or flower bed. Some mammals, such as gophers and rabbits, will eat plants but may also become nuisances by digging holes or burrows. Rats and mice cause less damage to plants but might be a health hazard due to the diseases that they carry. There are other mammals one might find around the garden, such as skunks, opossums, and cats and dogs, but these are more of a nuisance, rather than major pests, to gardeners. Birds can also be garden pests. They can dig up and eat newly planted seeds or transplants and they also harvest fruits and seeds from crops before you do. This brochure will help you to manage gophers, ground squirrels, rabbits, and birds in the garden.

The first step in managing a pest is to identify it, usually by actually observing the animal, by recognizing the type of injury it causes, or by other signs of the animal. The second step is to decide when the damage becomes sufficient for you to try to control the pest. For example, a rabbit that eats a couple of lettuce leaves may not be a problem but a family of rabbits eating your entire crop would be. Finally, you must consider what options you have to reduce damage. These include:

- Exclusion - keeping the animal out either by fencing or netting.
- Removal - trapping the animal.
- Poisoning - toxic baits.
- Repellents - either by taste or smell.
- Scare tactics - sights, movements, sounds, foul, plastic owls, and motion activated water sprays.
- Habitat modifications - removing brush piles and weeds so the animal cannot hide or rest.

GOPHERS

 Damage: Pocket gophers feed on plants both above and below ground. Gophers also gnaw and damage plastic water lines and lawn sprinkler systems.

Signs: Mounds of fresh, fine soil, usually in a crescent shape, are the most noticeable signs of gophers.

Management:

- Trapping - follow the directions on the trap or consult with a pest control contractor for suitable materials.
- Repellents - Plants such as gopher purg (Euphorbia lathyris), castor bean, and garlic have been suggested as repellents but these claims have not been substantiated by research.
- Exclusion - keeping the animal cannot hide or rest.
- Habit modification - removing brush piles and weeds so the animal cannot hide or rest. It is best to use bait boxes (small boxes that the squirrel must enter to get to the bait) rather than spot baiting. Place sufficient bait in the main underground tunnels for a period of five or more consecutive days. It is best to use bait boxes (small boxes that the squirrel must enter to get to the bait) rather than spot baiting. Place sufficient bait in the main underground tunnels for a period of five or more consecutive days.

GROUND SQUIRRELS

 Management:

- Trapping - Traps are practical for control when squirrel numbers are low to moderate. However live-catch traps present the problem of how to dispose of the live animals. Because ground squirrels carry diseases and are agricultural pests, the California Fish and Game Code specifies that it is illegal to release them elsewhere.
- Toxic Baits - Anticoagulant baits can be used for controlling ground squirrels. Anticoagulant baits are consumed in several feedings over a period of five or more consecutive days. It is best to use bait boxes (small boxes that the squirrel must enter to get to the bait) rather than spot baiting. Place sufficient bait in box for repeated feedings. Baits are preferred around homes and other areas where children and pets are present.

RABBITS

 Management:

- Fumigation - Fumigate in spring or fall when soil moisture is high. Check with your local nursery or licensed pest control contractor for suitable materials.
- Frightening devices: Reflective tape and fluttering objects might help temporarily but will lose effectiveness as birds become accustomed to them.

BIRDS

 Management:

- Exclusion - Keep birds off of newly planted seed or transplants with row covers. Large vegetable plants and fruit trees can be covered with plastic bird netting to prevent birds from feeding on them.
- Repellents - Bird repellents are usually used for keeping geese and other water birds away from pools and ponds. These are not effective for deterring birds from gardens.
- Frightening devices: Reflective tape and fluttering objects might help temporarily but will lose effectiveness as birds become accustomed to them.

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