



POCKET GOPHERS

There are five species of gophers in California. The most common gopher on the central coast is Botta's pocket gopher, named for his fur lined cheek pockets used to carry food.

Pocket gophers live 3 years. They do not hibernate and although primarily nocturnal grazers, they are active anytime. They have 3-5 litters per year with 2-10 young per litter.

They are solitary and territorial. A male gopher territory can be up to 2200 sq ft. Gopher tunnels tend to be linear in orientation.

Damage - below ground on a wide variety of garden crops: ornamentals, vines, shrubs, trees and utility cables. Above ground - irrigation pipes and tubing.

Gopher mounds: Crescent shaped mounds with openings plugged during inactivity or nesting. The plugged hole is to one side of the crescent of soil.

Tunnels - Main tunnels are 6-12 inches below ground level

Management

Gophers are classified as non-game animals and can therefore be controlled at any time, without a license, using any legal method.

High density gophers: use exclusion, toxic baits and sometimes trapping

Low density gophers: use exclusion, trapping and predators

Not effective: fumigants, repellent products or plants, noise makers, flooding, or gassing tunnels.

Exclusion - Use 2-foot-deep trenches filled with aggregate or coarse gravel. Use gopher baskets or underground ½ to ¾ inch mesh aviary wire placed at least 2 feet deep and extending 6-12 inches above grade for plants and trees. Use galvanized or stainless-steel wire mesh under raised beds to extend life of barrier.

Trapping

Basic principles - Trap in areas of fresh mounds with dark moist soil; focus on one area at a time, work with neighbors, progress to adjacent areas setting up a perimeter of control. Set traps in early morning or late afternoon, no bait used in traps, flag and stake traps to keep secure and to locate, wear gloves, check traps often, collapse mounds to monitor activity.

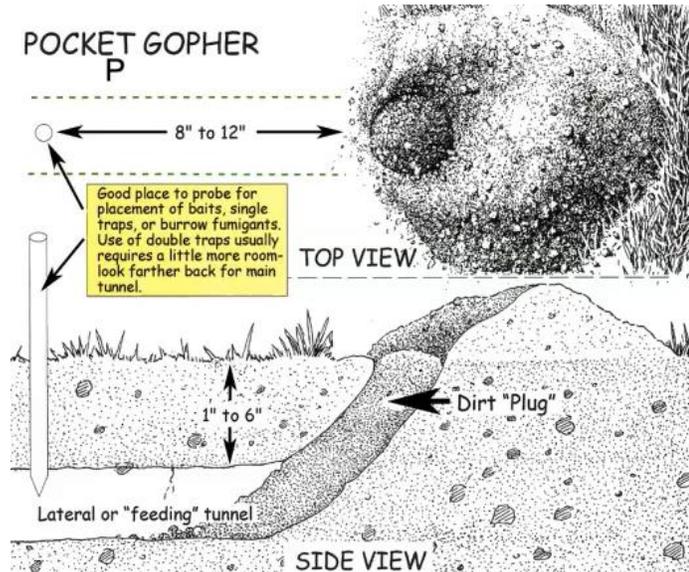


Photo credit: David Headrick



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	Box trap	Cinch	Macabee	Gopher hawk
Pros	Easy to set. Minimal digging. No contact with carcass. Designed for gopher biology. No non-target concerns.	Minimal digging. Easy to see. No contact with carcass. Designed for gopher biology.	Easy to set. They are buried so no non-target concerns. Inexpensive (~\$10), long lasting.	No digging. Easy indicator when gopher trapped.
Cons	Can get backfilled, need to move. Expensive (~\$25), but long lasting.	Difficult to set. Non-target concerns. Moderate cost (~\$15).	Requires digging and two traps. Small size doesn't work in larger tunnels. Full contact with carcass.	Difficult to extract carcass. Full contact with mutilated carcass. Expensive. Do not last.

Table credit: David Headrick

Box trap - Requires the least digging once tunnel is located; easiest to set as it is placed into tunnel opening.

Cinch Trap - Takes hand strength to set. Once tunnel exposed, easy to set in place due to long neck on trap. Easy release to dispose of trapped gopher without touching rodent. Medium size, best for trapping.

Macabee - Commonly used trap. Easy to set once technique is learned. Low profile of trap allows maneuvering in tunnel. Can push into tunnel without risk of springing trap. This trap will rust over time which can impede effectiveness.

Gopher Hawk - Easy to set, does not require digging. It is set above tunnel with a probe into the ground along with a wire that will trap the gopher. Requires skill in locating tunnel.

Gophers can repopulate tunnels within hours or days. Control requires consistent monitoring for activity and persistent management.

Baits - available but can pose a threat to non-target animals. Bait placement is only allowed directly into a tunnel. Placement above ground is illegal. Gopher probe is used to place strychnine pellets directly below ground into a tunnel; effective with one feeding.

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