Moles and gophers are underfoot in gardens
By Lee Oliphant, UCCE Master Gardener

Q. Something is digging in my garden around my plants. How do I know if it is a mole or a gopher and what do I do about it? Nancy W., Cambria.

Action underground is triggered by moist soil. Moles and gophers are busy at work this time of year. With a little careful observation, you can identify the creature that is raising havoc under your feet. It's essential to identify the culprit before trying to rid your garden of these pesky freeloaders.

A pocket gopher, so named for the little pockets inside his cheeks where he stores dirt as he digs, makes tunnels in the earth leaving mounds of fresh soil on the surface. These mounds often form a U shape.

Moles, somewhat smaller than a gopher, tunnel just below the surface of the earth, toppling young plants and disturbing seedlings. Both gophers and moles are searching for food as they tunnel through a garden, but their food preferences are quite different.

Gophers are herbivores, preferring herbaceous plants, shrubs, and trees. **If a shrub dies overnight, it is often a sign that a gopher has eaten the roots.** Trapping and applying bait deep in the tunnel are common methods of ridding your garden of gophers. A wire basket surrounding newly planted trees or shrubs will protect the roots from these pests. For more information on gopher management, visit
http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu./PMG/PESTNOTES/pn7433.html.

Moles are insectivores; insect-eating mammals that tunnel just under the soil surface leaving round mounds of soil as they excavate their tunnels. They are most commonly a problem when they burrow through lawns. Mole traps,

different from gopher traps, can be effective. Specific baits made for moles are available, but limited research has been conducted on the effectiveness of many repellents and baits. Find more information on mole control at http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn74115.html.

As in all Integrated Pest Management (IPM) plans for maintaining a healthy garden, a bit of tolerance goes a long way.