

Got Gophers?

By Suzanne Mullins

I was not surprised when a recent search of Master Gardener Hotline queries revealed 52 out of 134 queries were gopher related. San Diego County has a prolific population of gophers plus other rodents like moles & voles. Mole burrows are just inches below the surface of your yard and a single line of mounded soil is their calling card; while gopher burrows are underground and deeper so those large mounds scattered around your yard are all the soil they have moved and pushed out to form the main tunnel. Voles (Meadow Mice) are smaller than a mouse, stay above ground or in shallow burrows in areas covered with dried foliage, are active day & night, eating through unopened seed packets, building nests of grass clippings, leaving dropping everywhere. Voles can be chased off your property by just removing dense vegetation and fallen debris around your plants & vegetable gardens.

In my opinion, gophers win the prize for creating chaos in our gardens, snacking on earthworms, excavating large amounts soil, creating unwanted mounds and holes, undermining slopes, and damaging wires, cables & pipes.

Here are some things that **do not work** according to a bulletin published by the University of Nebraska Lincoln Extension: “Placing mothballs in burrows makes the gopher reroute their burrow away from the odor. Plants like Chrysanthemum, Castor Bean & Gopher Purge (Euphorbia) have not proven to be effective in repelling gophers. Electronic, vibrating, & magnetic devices have also not proven effective.” Experts from the [University of California explain](#). “Most fumigants, such as gas cartridges, are not effective because gophers quickly seal off their tunnels when they detect the smoke or poison gases.”

In 2020, Governor Newsom signed into law Assembly Bill 1788, which prohibits almost all uses of second-generation anticoagulant rodenticides (SGARs) statewide. Rodenticide products containing brodifacoum, bromadiolone, difenacoum, or difethialone have been restricted materials in California since 2014. They are only available for use by licensed pest control applicators.

What is available to the DIY population? If you live in a rural area, and are *lucky*; coyotes, hawks, owls, snakes, and the neighbors' cat or dog are capable of lessening the gopher, mole and vole populations. Realistically, **repellants**, **baits** that do not contain the 2nd Generation anticoagulants, and **traps** are the most viable way to mitigate unwanted rodents in your yard.

There are several repellant options to choose from. I have had success moving the gophers away from my yard using a product that contains biodegradable white pepper, cinnamon, garlic and peppermint oils. My choice is available in either granular or a spray (when the bottle is attached to a garden hose). I use both forms and they work reasonably well to keep newcomers at bay, but must be reapplied every 4 to 6 weeks. The directions on the label reads “Note: Pest activity may increase during the first 7 days of treatment as animals leave the area.” I follow up the treatment by baiting & setting traps in the new burrows for as long the mounds continue to appear.



The type of trap I have been using now for almost four years was recommended by Master Gardener Joe Boldt. The brand is Gopher Hawk, manufactured in Oxnard, California.

The trap is humane, requires no excavation to install, and it is easy to set. The Gopher Hawk is a “choker-style” box trap that allows for direct insertion into the main burrow. A reaming tool is provided with the trap to widen the entrance to the main burrow. The technique to find the main burrow sometimes is challenging because the mounds that you see are not the main tunnel but side tunnels that the gopher made to push the soil out of the main tunnel. However, if you take a

metal probe 30”-36” long and poke around the mounds 8”-12” away from the center of the mound, sooner or later the probe will suddenly give way...you have found the main tunnel. Additional instructions on finding the main burrow can be found in IPM Pest Notes Pocket Gophers #7734 (2018) pnpacketgophers.pdf The Gopher Hawk is mentioned briefly in this pest note with the entry: “little is known about the efficacy of this trap.”

My quest for gopher annihilation may never be realized, however, the satisfaction of pulling up the trap with a dead gopher attached...well, that makes my day. Perhaps pnpacketgophers.pdf needs an edit?

Sources:

University of Montana Lincoln Ext g1509.indd

[Pocket Gophers / Asparagus / Agriculture: Pest Management Guidelines / UC Statewide IPM Program \(UC IPM\)](#)

[Pocket Gophers / Home and Landscape / UC Statewide IPM Program \(UC IPM\)](#)

pnpacketgophers.pdf