Gophers

Gophers are small burrowing rodents that feed on roots of many types of plants.

A single gopher can ruin a garden in a short time, and gopher gnawing can damage irrigation lines and sprinkler systems. In lawns, their mounds are unsightly and interfere with mowing. Early detection is critical to prevent damage. Use both traps and underground fencing to manage gopher problems. Toxic baits are available but can pose threats to wildlife, pets, and children, especially in backyard situations.

Keep your eye out for gopher mounds.

- Gophers spend almost all their time underground in their burrow and aren't commonly seen.
- Look for mounds of loose dirt that are half circles or crescent-shaped with a plugged hole that is off to one side of the mound.
- Fresh mounds are the sign of an active gopher. A single gopher can create several mounds a day.
- In contrast to gopher mounds, mole mounds are circular with a plug in the middle, and ground squirrel holes are unplugged without a mound.

Avoid products and methods that aren't proven.

- Although many predators feed on gophers, installing owl boxes is unlikely to reduce gopher numbers enough to prevent damage.
- No repellents currently sold successfully protect plants from gophers.
- Plants such as gopher purge, castor bean, and garlic haven't been shown to repel gophers from an area.
- Frightening devices such as vibrating stakes, ultrasonic devices, and wind-powered pinwheels haven't been effective in research trials.
- Fumigation with smoke or gas cartridges isn't effective, because gophers can seal off their burrows rapidly.

Use traps to reduce the gopher population.

- Gopher traps are placed underground inside the gopher burrow, so you must use a gopher probe to locate the burrow.
- Be sure to place traps in active burrows as indicated by fresh mounds.
- Two common types of traps are pincer traps and box traps.
- Set traps in tunnels in pairs facing each other.
- Cover the hole so light doesn't get in.
- Check traps often and reset as necessary.
- Keep trapping until no new mounds are formed.
- Gopher traps don't require food baits.

What you do in your home and landscape affects our water and health.

- Minimize the use of pesticides that pollute our waterways and harm human health.
- Use nonchemical alternatives or less toxic pesticide products whenever possible.
- Read product labels carefully and follow instructions on proper use, storage, and disposal.

Protect plants with underground fencing.

- Lay hardware cloth or ¾-inch-mesh poultry wire under raised beds before planting.
- Wire baskets can be installed at planting to protect individual shrubs or trees, leaving enough room for roots to grow.

For more information about managing pests, visit ipm.ucanr.edu or your local University of California Cooperative Extension office.