

Gopher Report / Update

January 2021

From Judy Culbertson of The Gopher Trapper:

A little gopher education 101:

- 1) Gophers are active year around, with spring and fall being the seasons of highest activity. They do NOT hibernate during winter and are capable of tunneling under frozen ground. They are active at all times of day and only rarely emerge from their burrows.
- 2) Gophers are strict herbivores, eating the roots of all kinds of plants and trees. They will also chew off plants just above ground and pull the plants underground to eat. Plants with strong odors (mint, lavender, marigolds) tend to be less bothered by gophers, but not immune. Gophers consume about 60% of their body weight in vegetation each day.
- 3) Gophers are capable of killing even large trees, if left unchecked.
- 4) Aside from times of mating or weaning young, gophers are anti-social, solitary animals. They are also extremely territorial and will fight to protect their tunnel systems and food caches from intruders. They do not form communities like other rodents such as ground squirrels, rats, and prairie dogs.
- 5) Gophers are prolific hoarders. When foraging, they collect food in their cheek pouches to carry down to caching chambers where they save it for later consumption.
- 6) Gophers can gnaw electrical wires or water lines for sprinkler and irrigation systems.
- 7) Gophers, being rodents, can carry diseases (rabies, hantavirus, leptospirosis). However, transmission of these diseases to humans is extremely rare because they come above ground so infrequently (most often at night) and stay close to their burrows. In fact, gophers are so timid and easily frightened that they seldom interact with humans or other animals. Also, living underground, they are less prone to have fleas, which can transmit disease.
- 8) Gophers require 1,500-2,000 square feet of area for their burrows. Tunnels range from 2 inches to 2 feet deep. Gophers equip their tunnel systems with travel runs, drainage tunnels, and chambers for living, eating, storage and excreting waste. They can tunnel up to 30 feet per day and

Gopher Report / Update

January 2021

move 2 1/2 tons of dirt over the course of a year. Walls, fences, patios, streets and even house foundations do not pose any obstacle for gopher digging.

9) Gophers like to utilize areas of pre-dug soil for tunneling. If the soil is loose, it takes less effort to dig. Look for mounds near water lines, utility lines, septic tanks, berms, or heavily amended garden beds.

What can be done?

A realistic expectation is to minimize and control gopher activity.

Eradication is not an achievable goal, as there are always more gophers beyond your property. Gophers are underground travelers with a large range.

1) Let's start with remedies that do not work. Smoke bombs or gas, cat litter, dog droppings, sound/vibration devices, stepping on mounds, flooding tunnels, other dead rodents, coffee grounds, peppermint oil, and cayenne pepper do not work. You may see a lull in activity, but gophers will easily block one tunnel and proceed to dig in another direction within your yard. We see mixed reviews on commercial repellants but often trap in areas where products such as MoleMax have been used to no avail. It is not unusual for us to trap in places where poison has been used, which leads us to believe its effectiveness is limited.

2) Once a gopher shows itself by pushing up dirt mounds, it is time to act. The sooner traps can be set, the greater the chance of success and the more damage can be limited. It is very important NOT to disturb the mounds, as they help us find the tunnels. Vigilance and quick action are key.

3) While trapping kills the offending gopher, it is common for a new gopher to start using an existing tunnel system sometime later. This will result in the reappearance of gopher activity in the same area.

4) To minimize gopher invasions, the options are limited and NOTHING is 100% effective. Protecting garden beds with a fine stainless-steel mesh helps. It should be placed at a depth of 2 feet and should wrap up to the surface around the perimeter. Wire gopher baskets, available at most garden centers, can be used to protect individual plantings, although they are too small for trees.

Gopher Report / Update

January 2021

5) Dogs that have a habit of digging in search of rodents they smell are also a good deterrent. Gophers usually clear out of an area if the dog persists.