

Tip of the Month *A mole? a vole? May a gopher hole?*

With Spring comes a profusion of flowers, baby birds and... mounds of dirt. Who's responsible for those mysterious mounds, and are they a threat to your garden or just a minor nuisance? Before you go full Caddy Shack, it's best to be sure who you're dealing with – and consider whether your visitor is a worthy opponent or a local character to be tolerated.

Who's Who?

Although ground squirrels are increasingly common in town, they are more visible and active above ground than elusive moles, voles and pocket gophers, which are among the most common local burrowing mammals. Although we're cohabitants year-round, we often see more frequent evidence of these small, digging critters when the ground is soft but not saturated. Even irrigated landscapes, which make ideal year-round habitat, may see spikes in activity in spring and fall. Use the table on the following page to see who might be visiting your yard, and consider these tips before you react.



Gopher nests and tunnels can be deep under ground

Do!

- Learn tolerance. These creatures are pillars of the community: they help to build soil and their tunnels are used by invertebrates and other small animals. They're also an important food source for raptors, bobcats, foxes, snakes, weasels, great blue herons, and more.
- Practice cultural controls. These include landscaping with plants that require little or no summer water, and installing plants with fibrous root systems, like native bunch grasses, which are less attractive to gophers.
- Use gopher baskets, pots or raised beds with solid bottoms for valuable plants such as tomatoes and ornamental shrubs. Be cautious when planting trees in gopher baskets, as they can girdle growing roots

Don't!

- Don't poison. Poison intended for pests can be eaten by pets and even children. Even if the target animal is the only one that directly eats the poison, consuming poisoned prey can result in weakness or even death for local predators like owls, foxes, coyotes, and mountain lions. Please don't poison our natural pest control!
- Don't dig up your entire yard and line it with wire mesh. It's extremely destructive to the roots of existing trees, and is a temporary barrier that will be a frustrating obstacle to gardening in the future.

	Mole <i>Scapanus spp.</i>	Pocket Gopher <i>Thomomys bottae</i>	California Vole <i>Microtus californicus</i>
Damage	Mostly aesthetic; can sometime dislodge young plants	Can kill entire plants and small trees by consuming their roots or even the entire plant	Unchecked populations can severely damage young trees
Mounds	Volcano-shaped or irregular eruptions	Crescent-shaped with a central plug	None; holes are left open
Favorite Foods	Omnivores: primarily earthworms and insects; sometimes plant material	Herbivores: roots, tubers, bulbs, stems, leaves	Herbivores: above-ground grasses and stems
Behavior	Solitary	Solitary and antisocial: one gopher per burrow except when breeding	Social: shared or overlapping burrows
Burrows	Small, shallow feeder tunnels lift and crack the soil surface, often following hard edges such as walls	Variable, up to several feet deep and several inches in diameter	Small and shallow, connected by a network of narrow above-ground pathways
Breeding	Spring	1-3 litters per year, or more in irrigated landscapes	Year-round, based on food abundance
Trapping	Difficult	Moderately difficult	Easy



Mole mound



Gopher mounds