

Pocket Gopher



Photo by Chuck Abbe

Gophers are herbivores and eat a variety of plants, such as leafy vegetables above ground and roots and tubers underground. They constitute an important food source for many wild animals. Owls, hawks, foxes, coyotes, badgers, weasels and snakes eat gophers. Gophers also play a major role in soil dynamics. Their constant digging results in vertical cycling of soil. This counteracts the packing effect of grazers, makes the soil more porous and permeable, reduces run off and provides increased aeration for plants.

Gophers dig two types of burrows. One is a long, winding, shallow tunnel to obtain food, and the second a deep tunnel for shelter with chambers for food and nesting. Fan-shaped mounds of loose dirt distinguish gopher holes from circular mole hills.

For gophers eating plants and tunneling:

- Place hardware cloth (1/4 inch or 1/2 inch mesh) 18-20 inches deep around the perimeter of your garden to exclude gophers. Fasten commercial tree wrap around ornamental plants and trees.
- Plant daffodils, oleander, gopher or mole plant (*Euphorbia lathyris*) or other plants that gophers dislike. Check at your local nursery for suggestions.

To protect plant roots:

- Plant in underground baskets of 1/4 inch hardware cloth. Line the sides and bottoms of all planting holes and beds with galvanized wire mesh or light gauge mesh when planting trees and shrubs; they need protection only when young and vulnerable. Use a heavier mesh for permanent beds where you grow annuals and vegetables. Be sure to place the mesh deep enough to accommodate growing root crops and bulbs, and leave at least 3 inches of mesh above ground.
- Make your own root protectors using 3/4 inch hexagonal wire netting or purchase them ready-made.



Moles

Moles are insectivores and are very beneficial, aerating the soil and eating insects harmful to gardens. They do not eat vegetation and cause very little damage to plants. Gopher plant is reported to repel moles. Mole-Med is a castor bean extract that may repel moles when sprayed on lawns.