

Controlling Voles
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What are voles? Gopher and orchard mouse are two names for this nemesis. They are the size of a mouse with a short tail. They tunnel like moles but, unlike moles, they feed on plants. They chew on many plants but seem to crave certain ones – such as hosta.

Look for evidence of their nefarious activity. Softer plants just seem to disappear or die. When we dig up the plants, they have no roots, or they have chewed stems and lower leaves. Voles leave dramatic damage on woody plants. They chew lower stems and roots leaving fine 1/4 inch teeth marks. Look for these teeth marks when identifying vole injury.

Controlling them is a problem. Try trapping them. Find a tunnel, if possible. They often lead to areas where the little criminals hide. Dig up a hole there, leaving it open. Set a baited mousetrap and put it near the opening. Now set a box upside down over hole and trap. This keeps birds out. Cut a V notch in the part of the box touching the ground so they can get in and out. They will feed and get trapped. What do you use for bait? Make a paste of oatmeal and water. Put this paste on the bait holder of a mousetrap. Let it dry. This hard ball will be the bait.

Other control measures include tilling the area, removing the mulch and getting a hungry cat. The cat may be the best control, but it needs to be a hunter and you often cannot tell that when you get one.

When trying to control voles, remember that no matter what you do - you probably will not control them all. The surrounding woods and lawns can replenish those you kill. Learn to manage their levels and try to accept a little damage.