

at a glance

- Small burrowing rodents, pocket gophers are brown to black, 5 to 14 inches long, and have large claws on the front paws.
- They live 3 to 5 years.
- They are active year-round.
- Sexually mature at 1 year of age, pocket gophers produce one to two litters of young per year.
- They damage and kill pastures, lawns, trees, ornamental shrubs, and flowers.
- Their burrowing and mounding activity can injure people, horses, and livestock and increase weed infestations.

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Managing Pocket Gophers in Idaho Lawns and Landscapes

Introduction

Pocket gophers (figure 1) are one of Idaho's most prevalent and destructive vertebrate pests. These burrowing rodents are named for their fur-lined, external cheek pouches, or pockets, in which they carry food and nesting materials. Pocket gophers are 5 to 14 inches long, range in color from black to brown, and have small eyes and ears, flat heads with short necks, and large claws on the front paws.

Gopher burrows consist of a main tunnel and several lateral tunnels. As they dig their tunnels, pocket gophers push soil to the surface and deposit it in crescent or horseshoe-shaped mounds that are 12 to 18 inches wide and 4 to 6 inches high (figures 2 and 3). A single burrow system can cover 200 to 2,000 square feet. Gophers can create several mounds in one day. Fresh soil mounds indicate recent activity.

Gophers consume plants or plant materials including green, succulent vegetation, roots, bulbs, tubers, grasses, seeds, flowering plants, tree roots and bark, and pasture plants with palatable roots such as clovers and alfalfa.

Pocket Gopher Control

Restricting Access to High-Value Plants

Fences can be installed around shrubs, trees, and gardens. Use ½- to ¾-inch mesh wire and bury it 2 feet deep in soil, leaving 1 foot aboveground. Gravel can be laid around cables, and sprinkler lines can be encased in metal.



Figure 1. Pocket gopher. Photo by Glenn Shewmaker



Figure 2. Fresh gopher mound. The depression in the mound indicates a plugged hole. Photo by Danielle Gunn



Figure 3. Gopher burrow system, top (above) and side (below) views. Drawing by Betsy Morishita

Flooding

Water from a hose inserted into a gopher hole can push the gopher aboveground to be trapped or otherwise humanely terminated.

Trapping

Traps can be placed in the main or lateral tunnels. Locate fresh soil mounds as shown in figure 2, and dig with a shovel, following the plugged lateral tunnel until you reach the main tunnel. Place traps in the tunnel in pairs, facing in opposite directions. Set traps according to the manufacturer's directions. Farm supply stores sell a variety of traps. Box style traps are typically the easiest to use.

Connect traps to stakes with wire to prevent gophers from moving traps deep into the burrow system and predators from taking the gopher and trap. Some traps work best if light is excluded from the burrow by covering the entrance with soil or plywood.

Baiting

Poisonous rodenticide baits come in grain and pelletized forms (table 1). Locate the main tunnel by probing about 8 to 12 inches from the gopher mound to a depth of at least 4 inches. When the probe is over the main tunnel, it will easily drop about 2 inches. Dispense the correct amount of bait into the probe hole using a long spoon or probe, then close the hole. Handheld gopher baiting equipment (figure 4) allows



Figure 4. Handheld gopher baiting equipment. Photo by Danielle Gunn

Table 1. Rodenticides for use with hand baiting.

| RODENTICIDE | LEGAL CONSTRAINTS | TIMING | COMMENTS |
|----------------|--|---------------------------------|--|
| Strychnine | Cannot be used aboveground. | Early spring through late fall. | Very effective and lethal in a single feeding. Secondary poisonings may occur if animals feed on gophers killed by strychnine. |
| Zinc phosphide | Cannot be used aboveground. Some formulations are restricted-use products. | Early spring through late fall. | Use a handheld probe and baiting tool to dispense bait underground in the main tunnel. Do not get this product wet. |
| Rozol® | For noncrop use only. Some formulations are restricted-use products. | Early spring and late fall. | Use a handheld probe and baiting tool to dispense bait underground in the main tunnel. |

the user to probe for the tunnel and place a premeasured amount of bait in the burrow system.

After baiting, level gopher mounds or mark treated burrows with flags. These practices make it easier to detect new gopher activity and retreat as necessary.

ALWAYS read and follow the instructions printed on the pesticide label. The pesticide recommendations in this UI publication do not substitute for instructions on the label. Pesticide laws and labels change frequently and may have changed since this publication was written. Some pesticides may have been withdrawn or had certain uses prohibited. Use pesticides with care. Do not use a pesticide unless the specific plant, animal, or other application site is specifically listed on the label. Store pesticides in their original containers and keep them out of the reach of children, pets, and livestock.

Trade Names—To simplify information, trade names have been used. No endorsement of named products is intended nor is criticism implied of similar products not mentioned.

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