

LIVING WITH GOPHERS

Pocket gophers are found in varied habitats: deserts, scrub grasslands, mountain meadows, and urban and suburban landscapes. Gophers dig two types of burrows—long, winding, shallow tunnels to obtain food, and deep tunnels for shelter with chambers for food and nesting. Fan-shaped mounds of loose dirt distinguish gopher holes from circular mole hills. Mounds signify lateral runs of the main tunnel. Unlike moles, gophers usually plug their holes. They have external fur-lined cheek pouches used for transporting food. They eat a variety of plants—leafy vegetables above ground and roots and tubers underground. Female gophers may breed up to three times a year, normally producing five or six young per litter. The young disperse from the mother's burrow when they are two months old. A gopher's maximum life expectancy is about three years. Owls, hawks, foxes, badgers, coyotes, weasels, and snakes eat gophers.

Many people consider gophers pests, however they 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, reduces water run-off, and provides increased aeration for plants.

EATING PLANTS OR TUNNELING

- 1: Place hardware cloth (1/4" or 1/2" mesh) 18—20" deep. Wrap commercial tree wrap around ornamental plants and trees. Reduce cover and control weeds.
- 2: Place used clay cat litter in the hole.
- 3: Some plants are not attractive to gophers. Check at your local nursery.

PROTECTING PLANT ROOTS

- 1: Plant in underground baskets of chicken wire. Line all planting holes and beds—sides and bottoms—with galvanized wire mesh or light gauge mesh when planting trees and shrubs; they need protection only while 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" of mesh above ground.
- 2: Make your own root protectors using 3/4" hexagonal wire netting or purchase them ready made.



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