

Sebastian County is more than blessed with an abundance of wildlife. We're usually quite pleased with that until the cause damage to our property. One common nuisance in our area is pocket gophers. Pocket gophers are rodents that live underground. They love to feast on vegetation. Some old-timers call these creatures "Salamanders," probably in reference to the habit of making sandy mounds in yards and fields.

As a rule, in Sebastian County gophers are most commonly found in large yards with an abundance a turf interspersed with a few trees, pastures, and rolling terrain. There must be vegetation for the pocket gopher to eat on the site. Vegetables, bulbs, and tree roots are all targets.

Gophers are easily distinguished from moles by their damage. Gophers create large, non-symmetrical mounds. Often they are shaped like a kidney bean. Sometimes there is a distinctive "plug" in the middle (see Fig. 1), but this is also just as likely to be missing. If you are familiar with the movie "Caddyshack" this is the critter that Karl the Groundskeeper was obsessed with. (Extension does NOT advocate Karl's techniques!)



Figure 1. A perfectly shaped pocket gopher mound.

From either the plug or the low side of the mound there will extend a lateral tunnel (usually filled with dirt) that connects to the main tunnel system. The gopher will traverse the main tunnel often, but uses the laterals to expel soil. See figure 2. If viewed from a distance, it is usually clear where the tunnel system is heading. This gives a good clue where to look for the main tunnel.

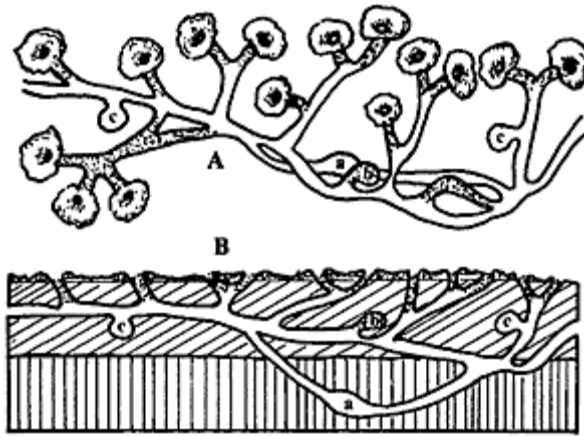


Figure 2. A Pocket gopher's tunnel system.

Gophers tend to be fairly solitary, so if you kill a gopher, odds are good you've removed the only gopher in that tunnel system. Of course, on a large lot, there may be multiple tunnel systems, each with a gopher.

The two best techniques to rid yourself of gophers are trapping and using poison baits. This makes eliminating them easy.

Trapping

Trapping is the most consistent and reliable way to kill gophers.

To trap pocket gophers you must understand one important facet of their biology: **GOPHERS HAVE AN INSATIABLE URGE TO CLOSE OPEN TUNNELS!** This means you need to open up their tunnel system so that the main tunnel is exposed to air. You can find the main tunnel by probing the soil with a pipe, broomstick, or soil probe. Begin looking about 1 foot in from the lowest point on a **FRESH** mound toward an imaginary line that's centered between the mounds in the general direction of the tunneling. You can place a trap in a fully opened lateral tunnel or place 2 traps (one in each direction) in the main tunnel. Either can be effective. The traps that are shaped like a tunnel are the best for the laterals, but success is more likely by placing traps in the main tunnel. Gopher traps only work in one direction, so one must be placed going in each direction in the main tunnel. Figure 3 shows the Victor Gopher Trap. Its placement is shown in Figure 4. Virtually all types of gopher traps are effective on gophers. (But not moles!) You should see success within 24. If not, wait another day and if you still aren't having any luck, find a new tunnel.



Figure 3. Victor Gopher Trap

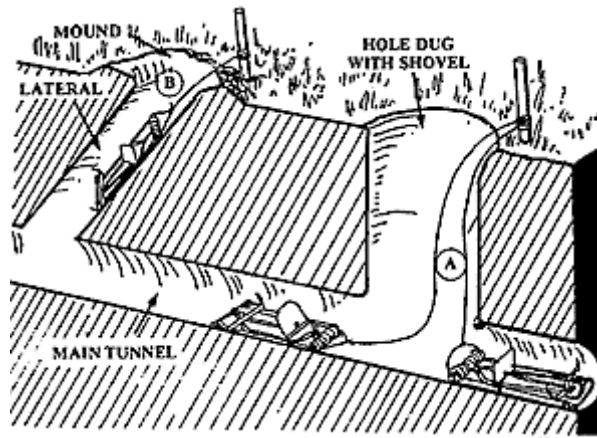


Figure 4. Placing a gopher trap

Baiting

Baiting gopher relies on their hunger for vegetable matter. A palatable bait closely resembles their natural food. The key to baiting gophers is to get the bait into their tunnels so they can find it. Probe until you find its main tunnel (or open up a lateral) and insert the bait into the hole. You should cover the hole you made with sod or a rock, but be sure not to bury the bait in soil.

Gassing

Gassing gophers is often practiced and should work in theory, however in practice it is seldom successful. The gas simply does not move through the tunnel system fast enough or with enough concentration to do the job. One [experimental system](#) is being investigated by an Extension Agent in Arizona, however effectiveness has not yet been determined.

Flooding

Flooding is really only an option when a solid flood can be brought onto a site for a considerable time. Unless you plan to turn your yard into a rice paddy, I would not recommend flooding.

Chewing gum, windmills, and other folk remedies should be avoided since trapping is not difficult.

University of Arkansas, United States Division of Agriculture and County Governments Cooperating

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