



GOPHERS



Pocket Gophers (*Thomomys spp.*) are stout-bodied, short-legged rodents. They have fur-lined external cheek pouches or pockets in which food is carried. These pockets give the animal its common name. Pocket gophers have brown coats, small eyes and ears, long incisors and long claws on their front feet. They are six to twelve inches long.

Damage

In home yards and gardens, gophers cut and eat the roots of trees, shrubs and vines. They gnaw the bark at the base of trees, especially young trees. The trees are sometimes girdled and subsequently die. Gophers eat a wide variety of roots, bulbs, tubers, grasses and seeds. They can also damage plastic water lines and sprinkler systems.

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Habits

Gophers dig extensive underground tunnel systems (burrows), which can cover as much as an acre of ground. Tunnels are two to four inches in diameter, run parallel to the ground surface, and are located six to eighteen inches deep. The soil from these tunnels is pushed to the surface through short lateral tunnels made at frequent intervals. This results in a series of mounds, which usually indicate the location of the main tunnel. Gopher mounds are relatively flat. They vary from one to three feet in height. The mound fans out from a hole near one edge of the mound resulting in a crescent shape.

Gopher mound



Gophers are rarely seen above ground, only occasionally when feeding, pushing dirt out of tunnels or when moving to a new area.

Control

- Exclusion - Some protection may be achieved by using ½-inch wire mesh fence buried two feet below ground and extending two feet above ground. This can be expensive but may be practical in areas such as bulb beds.

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- There is no conclusive evidence that the plant gopher spurge, *Euphorbia lathyris*, grown as a repellent is effective.
- Because no population will increase indefinitely, an alternative is to do nothing, letting the gopher population limit itself. However, usually by the time populations level off, intolerance damage has been done.
- Flooding may bring gophers to the surface but the yard may be damaged by that much water.
- Predators, especially owls and cats, eat pocket gophers but usually cannot keep up with the population. Owls usually aren't present in home yards.
- Fumigation is usually not effective because gophers quickly seal off tunnels.