



March 2011

Ada County Pest of the Month



**A quick guide to identifying and controlling
invasive plants and animals found in the county**

VOLES

A Vole is a small rodent resembling a mouse but with a stouter body, a shorter hairy tail, a slightly rounder head, smaller ears and eyes, and differently formed molars (high-crowned and with angular cusps instead of low-crowned and with rounded cusps). There are approximately 155 species of voles. They are sometimes known as meadow mice or field mice.



Quick Facts

Voles will readily thrive on small plants. Like shrews they will eat dead animals and like mice or rats, they can live on most any nut or fruit. Additionally, voles will target plants more than most other small animals. It is here where their presence is mostly evident. Voles will readily girdle small trees and ground cover much like a porcupine. This girdling can easily kill young plants and is not healthy for trees or other shrubs.

Voles love to eat succulent root systems and will burrow under plants or ground cover they are particularly fond of and eat away until the plant is dead. Bulbs in the ground are another favorite target for voles; their excellent burrowing and tunneling gives them access to sensitive areas without clear or early warning. A vole problem is often only identifiable after they have destroyed a number of plants.

Habitat



Voles construct burrow systems of many shallow tunnels and surface runways that may contain several adults and young.

Voles inhabit wildlands or croplands adjacent to buildings or gardens and landscaped sites with protective ground cover. Most problems around homes and gardens occur during outbreaks of vole populations.

Voles spend most of their time below ground in their burrow system. The clearest signs of their presence are the well-traveled, above ground runways that connect burrow openings. A protective layer of grass or other ground cover usually hides the runways. The maze of runways leads to multiple burrow openings that are each about 1-1/2 to 2 inches in diameter.

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How to Control

Trapping

You can use a simple, wooden mouse trap baited with a peanut butter-oatmeal mixture or apple slices, although often you won't need to use bait, because voles will trigger the trap as they pass over it. Trap placement is crucial. Voles seldom stray from their runways, so set traps along these routes. Look for burrows and runways in grass or mulch in or near the garden. Place the traps at right angles to the runways with the trigger end in the runway. Examine traps daily, removing dead voles or resetting sprung traps as needed. Continue to trap in one location until you stop catching voles then move the trap to a new location 15 to 20 feet away. Destroy old runways or burrows with a shovel or rototiller to deter new voles from immigrating to the site.



Baiting

When voles are numerous or when damage occurs over large areas, toxic baits can be the quickest and most practical means of control. Take necessary measures to ensure the safety of children, pets, and nontarget animals, and follow all product label instructions carefully.

Anticoagulants, often referred to as multiple-feeding baits, interfere with an animal's blood-clotting mechanisms, eventually leading to death. They probably are the safest type of rodent bait for use around homes and gardens, because they are slow acting, must be consumed during a period of 5 or more days to be effective, and have an effective antidote, vitamin K1, making it safer to use around children and pets. Anticoagulant baits are available at many retail stores.

You can't use some anticoagulants such as brodifacoum and bromadiolone because of the potential risk they pose to predators such as cats and dogs. These are common over-the-counter rat and mouse poisons. Check the label carefully to ensure it lists that the bait is suitable for use on voles or meadow mice.

Important: To ensure the safety of nontarget animals, place bait directly inside of vole burrows.

Natural Control

Many predators including coyotes, foxes, badgers, weasels, cats, gulls, and especially hawks and owls eat voles. However, in most cases predators can't keep vole populations below damaging levels.



For questions or concerns, please contact :

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