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## *Vertebrate: Voles*

*Use Integrated Pest Management (IPM) for successful plant problem management.*

### ***Biology***

The Pacific Northwest hosts about 16 vole species. These native rodents are important food sources for hawks, owls and other predators but a few species can cause serious damage to yards and gardens. Most species are skilled diggers and construct tunnel systems for shelter and for feeding on plant roots and bulbs.

Voles are generally identified by their small ears, blunt noses, small front feet and relatively short tails. Most species range in size from 5-8 inches in length. Voles feed on a wide variety of mostly grasses and forbs during the summer and on roots, bark and bulbs during the winter. Damage is usually identified easily by the tiny tooth-scars on woody plants.

Voles and their early offspring can have several litters over the summer so populations can fluctuate from just a few to several hundred per acre. During high population episodes, damage to plants is severe. Bulbs and roots are often completely eaten over winter and trees can be completely girdled. Most damage is below ground but voles will also tunnel through snow to feed higher on tree trunks. During the spring, feeding moves to the new growth as herbaceous plants sprout and leaf out.

### ***Management Options***

#### **Non-Chemical Management**

- ~ Vegetation management is key for managing vole populations: Keep lawns mowed as short as the grass variety allows.
- ~ Avoid ground covers that provide cover for voles and prune shrubs so branches are not on the ground.
- ~ Mulch no more than a couple inches deep around plants.
- ~ "Home remedies" are not consistently effective against voles.
- ~ Flooding and smoke "bombs" are seldom effective. Both are easily absorbed into the soil.
- ~ Barriers are somewhat effective deterrents, but are impractical except for small areas and special situations. Hardware cloth (1/4-inch mesh, which will also keep out moles) or other suitable material may be buried beneath the soil (bury 24-30 inches deep, leaving about 6 inches above ground) to discourage vole attacks.
- ~ Raised beds can be protected by completely screening the bottom of the bed with hardware cloth before filling with soil.
- ~ Vole repellents have been useful for a time in some instances, but have not shown consistent results in our area.
- ~ If damage continues, control populations with common mouse traps set in the tunnels and runways. For more information, see the WSU Fact Sheet [Vole Management in Home Backyards and Gardens](https://s3.wp.wsu.edu/uploads/sites/2071/2014/04/Vole-Mgmt-Backyard-Gardens-FS094E.pdf)

***Select non-chemical management options as your first choice!***

#### **Chemical Management**

***IMPORTANT: Visit Home and Garden Fact Sheets for more information on using pesticides***

None recommended.

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*Images*



~ Caption: Townsend's vole  
~ Photo by: Dave Pehling