

Gopher Control

Gophers can be a real nuisance in gardens, but there are a number of nontoxic measures to be tried.

The best natural control is a king snake or gopher snake. They are difficult to obtain, but chances are if you live in a gopher-ridden area, that these snakes also inhabit the area. The point here is not to harm any helpful snakes you may find. We usually have 2-4 gopher snakes residing at the garden. They are unobtrusive and very shy of people. A 3-foot snake can handle baby gophers and mice easily, but they don't seem to get to the older gophers until they are bigger themselves. Unfortunately, one year 2 of our snakes got caught in the bird netting used to protect some beds and died before they were old enough to go after "grandpa gophers." Everyone at the garden now tries to stake bird netting up just enough for the snakes to slither beneath unharmed.

We've also used gopher clapper mills. These are wooden windmill-type contraptions set on broomsticks stuck into the ground. When the wind catches it, the clapper revolves and hits against the broomstick, sending a noisy vibration that gophers don't like into the ground. Most people have reported success, but for a few it doesn't seem to work. We find that one clapper protects a 100'squate foot bed and we've used them to protect our more vulnerable crops (potatoes and lettuce). Obviously, these klippity-klops only work where there is a strong, frequent wind. Along this same line, some people set empty soda-pop bottles into the ground so the wind whistles over the top. This noise is said to repel gophers and rabbits.

Daffodils and gopher plants (euphorbia lathyris) are both poisonous to gophers, but you almost have to surround your entire garden for good production. We haven't used gopher plants in the research garden because they are so poisonous to children.

Gophers are very sensitive to smelly things and will move their home when offended. One lady evicted her gophers by putting sardines down their holes. Also putting a rag soaked with something objectionable in a tin can down the hole seems to work. Remove both ends of the can and soak the rag in ammonia or some other strong smelling liquid. Remember that this is going into your food so consider toxicity, i.e. no gasoline or kerosene. Our favorite move is to urinate down their holes. It has always worked well for us; the gophers move their tunnel almost immediately, although one woman who tried it said it didn't work for her. It may be that male urine works better. (A urine trail around the chicken pen has been known to protect the hens from raccoons.) Urine can be collected in containers inside the home, jugs or jars, if privacy is a consideration. Remember that this is a repellent and you have to keep applying for maximum effectiveness. The gophers will simply move their tunnels and may return if you do not continue your assault on their comfort.

We use various gopher traps when we find any freshly dug holes, but even when they work, they are not worth the time spent setting and checking them. We feel the damage has to be more than 10% of a crop before it is worth our time to go after them. An integrated program of gopher snakes, clappers and urinating around their holes seems to keep losses below 2% with little effort on our part. One year we planted a demonstration weed bed that was so popular with the gophers that they left the rest of the garden almost entirely alone.

Other methods which are alleged to work, but which we have not tried, include flooding them out, gassing with automotive exhaust, lining beds with wire, feeding them chewing gum and sprinkling cayenne pepper down their holes. Some seem overly labor intensive, questionable as to their healthfulness or difficult to implement.