## Voles

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Last year most of Wyoming had vole damage. Voles are mouse looking rodents which can damage or consume flower bulbs, garden plants, vegetables, and field and forage crops. Voles can scar lawns by constructing runways and clipping grass very close to the roots. Though the damage done usually is not permanent, it may detract from the appearance of a well-kept lawn. They also eat leaves, shoots, roots, tubers, and seeds of most grasses and broadleaved plants. Their damage may be severe enough to prevent self-seeding of annual landscape plantings. Hostas are a good indicator plant since they can be especially hard hit. While you can use baited mouse traps placed under overturned pots, there are other options available. When planting new bulbs or perennials, place them inside quarter inch wire mesh cages that go at least 6 inches into the ground. The cages prevent voles from being able to reach your plants. You can also add coarse material such as sharp gravel to your soil when planting. Voles prefer soft organic material and they won't dig through the sharp objects. Don't forget you can pick plants that voles do not like such as wood hyacinth, fritillaria, and daffodils.

Vole populations often are cyclic and can increase from 10 to 250 voles per acre. In North America, vole populations peak about every four years. These cycles are not necessarily regular or coupled with dramatic increases in numbers. Occasionally, high vole populations last about a year before crashing. These peaks occasionally result in severe damage to crops and landscapes.

Voles usually damage woody plants during late fall through early spring. Voles tunnel through snow, and may gnaw on trees and shrubs up to the height that snow accumulates. Individual tooth marks (about one sixteenth -inch wide and approximately three eights of an inch long) may be visible on the wood after winter vole damage. The gnawing marks left by voles will be irregular in appearance and at various angles. In contrast, rabbits leave tooth marks that are about one eight of an inch wide and very regular. Pine voles, and occasionally meadow and prairie voles, tunnel belowground and feed on roots of trees and shrubs.

Repellents made with thiram and capsaicin are registered for controlling vole damage on ornamental plants. Trapping is an effective method for controlling voles, if the damage is over a limited area (less than an acre) and a sufficient number of traps are used (two to three per runway and/or hole). Set single mouse snap traps perpendicular to vole runways with the triggers in the runways, or set two traps together within the runways with the triggers facing away from each other. Bait is generally not required. If you prefer to use bait, smear peanut butter mixed with oatmeal on trap triggers. Baited traps should be covered with a box with a one inch hole cut in it, to reduce attractiveness and access to birds and squirrels. Make sure boxes are securely positioned and of sufficient size to allow free action of the snap traps. Good enclosures can be made of PVC pipe and cardboard milk cartons. Large vole populations can be reduced most efficiently with toxic baits. Be sure to read all pesticide product labels thoroughly and comply with all directions given.

If your perennials, bulbs did not come up this spring or your shrubs died, check at ground level to see if the bark is missing or the plants have been eaten. The weather the last couple of years has taken a very heavy toll on our trees, especially this winter, we will see how things over wintered this spring. Even the wildlife are looking forward to spring this year.

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