

Durham Master Gardeners

Voles in a Vegetable Garden, June 5, 2019

About:

Members of the rodent family. They are compact animals with stocky bodies, short legs and a short tail. Their eyes are small and their ears are partially hidden. They usually are brown or gray, though many colour variations exist.

The meadow vole lives primarily above ground, in runways at the surface, or in mole tunnels with numerous entrances. Voles are active both day and night and throughout the year, since they do not hibernate. They are more likely to come out and forage near dawn and twilight. They construct many tunnels and surface runways with numerous burrow entrances. A single burrow system may contain several adults and young. Also can nest in mulch, weeds and plant debris around plants. Voles have 1 to 5 litters per year with 3 to 6 young in each litter. Usually feed on grass seeds, herbs and bulbs during spring and summer then shift to bark in the fall and winter. Vole gnaw marks are random and occur at various angles. Rabbits will cause uniform, larger marks and can even clip off entire branches. Activity peaks in spring and again in fall

Control voles by cultural methods, habitat modification and by trapping

- Mow lawn and turf areas regularly, and pull mulch away from the trunks of trees and ornamentals to prevent voles from hiding from predators in the mulch and chewing bark.
- Voles will avoid digging in pea gravel. Lay it at the base of fruit trees before winter.
- Use a floating row cover, fencing. Remember to remove floating row cover when plants flower to enable pollination
- Use traps to reduce population level of voles – snap mouse traps. Place the trap perpendicular to the surface runways with the trigger end in the runway. A peanut butter-oatmeal mixture, or apple slices, or whatever food they are feeding on in your garden make good baits. Apples are their favourite food.
- Products are available to deter rabbits and other wildlife such as Plantskydd™ – This is effective for up to six months for controlling deer, rabbits, voles and other small animals and does not to be reapplied after watering or rain.
- Plants voles love – tulips and apples

Plants voles avoid:

daffodil (*Narcissus*) – especially

grape hyacinth (*Muscari armeniacum*)

Italian arum (*Arum italicum*)

ornamental onions (several *Allium* species), garlic, snowdrop (*Galanthus nivalis*). These bulbs were evidently high in the sort of secondary metabolites that, among other things, cause plant tissue to taste bad.

Hellebores – Lenten rose

Castor beans - Some vole repellents like [Repellex](#) actually use castor oil to drive these pests away.

References

Reference Manual for Master Gardeners of Ontario

Garden Professors Blog, article by Dr William Miller, re: Curtis, B, D. Curtis, and W. Miller. 2009. Relative Resistance of Ornamental Flowering Bulbs to Feeding Damage by Voles. HortTechnology 19:499-503.

Pam Love
Durham Master Gardeners