

Massachusetts Master Gardener Association

FACT SHEET



Have Gardening Questions? The **Master Gardener Help Line Hours** are 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. on Fridays (all year) as well as Wednesdays (March-November) and Mondays (April-October).
Phone: 617-933-4929 Email: mg helpline@masshort.org.

Furry Garden Pests

Chipmunks and Squirrels: From the birdfeeder high on a pole to bulbs buried six inches underground, nothing is safe from chipmunks and squirrels. Squirrels especially like plants with seeds (sunflowers), newly planted seeds, fruits, nuts and vegetables. Chipmunks enjoy root crops, bulbs, and newly-sown seeds. Though they have logical thinking skills, squirrels and chipmunks are easily frightened, deterrents like beach balls, yard decorations or scarecrows can help, but only until they become accustomed to them. Squirrel and chipmunk repellants such as pellets or solutions of predator urine can be purchased at garden stores and placed around prized plants. Some gardeners use a hot pepper solution sprayed directly on the plants.

Mice and Rates: These nocturnal rodents live in close proximity to humans for two reasons: food and shelter. If you see chewed up vegetables in your garden, especially those that should be underground, like potatoes and carrots, you've most likely got mice, voles or rats. Mice and rats will eat seeds, bulbs, leaves and fruits of just about anything. Deer mice carry the ticks that cause Lyme disease. Since these rodents are fond of seeds, they are attracted to bird feeders. Place these far away from gardens and your home. Using toxic bait traps or poison should be the final option: wild animals may eat the bait directly or eat the dead rodent and ingest the toxins. To prevent rodents from entering your house, seal up cracks and holes; steel wool works well when first shoved into cracks and then sealed over. There are also ultrasonic noise machines that you can place in the tunnels in your yard.

Moles and Voles: Voles and moles are often confused. Voles are more known for debarking mature trees and chewing off the ends of shoots on new trees and seedlings, effectively killing them. They can dig extensive tunnels through lawns and gardens, uprooting plants along the way. Moles are insect-eating underground mammals that usually don't eat plants. Voles construct well-defined, visible feeding tunnel at or near the surface, enough to disturb lawns and seed beds. Their tunnels can also create runways for rodents to find your prized flower bulbs or root crops.

Because both moles and voles are rarely seen, identification should be made on the signs they leave behind. If there is a small volcano-like mound at the end of the tunnel, you have moles; if there is no mound, you have voles. The mole's preferred diet includes insect grubs, adult insects and earthworms. Neither common mole is a

rodent; therefore, any gnawing damage you detect on plants is unlikely to have been caused by moles. Moles rarely stay in the same location for long, and if you're patient, they will naturally leave your garden in search of other food sources.

You can repel, exclude, or trap moles. Some gardeners have success repelling moles by placing moth balls, human hair, ultrasonic noise emitters, or predator urine in their tunnels. Others have had success with castor oil sprayed on lawns and gardens. Create an underground fence of hardware cloth to exclude moles from prized bulb beds or new seedbeds. In small beds gardeners can create cages or baskets to protect prized plants. Dig a two- to three-foot-deep hole in the planting area and line the sides and bottom of the bed with wire mesh. Replace the soil and plant your garden. Protect trees with wire mesh guards placed a few inches below the soil line and two feet up the trunk.

Raccoons: Avoid feeding raccoons. Cover garbage cans and do not leave food remnants outdoors. To keep the raccoons away from your garden, protect individual plants with wire cages or surround the entire garden with wire mesh or an electrified fence. They will eat all kinds of fruits, berries, nuts, acorns, corn and other grains. They have been known to damage homes when in search of a dwelling place. Frighten raccoons using sound-producing devices and motion sensor lights. Use metal garbage cans and tie or anchor your garbage cans to prevent tipping. Cover chimney with chimney caps to prevent raccoons from entering in your home. Use covered composters.

Woodchucks a/k/a Groundhogs: These large rodents live in burrows, which are accessed by 10-12" hole in the ground, and they are active during the warmer months. Your vegetable garden can provide dinner for this vegetarian. Cucumbers and melons are their favorite dishes, but they are responsible for damaging flowers and vegetables, agricultural crops, orchards, nurseries and areas around buildings. Because woodchucks are excellent climbers, they can damage fruit trees and ornamental shrubs as they gnaw or claw woody plants. Motion devices, such as pinwheels, can frighten them away, as can repellent smells like Epsom salts or ammonia. Deny them a habitat by keeping tall weeds and grasses cut back; they are timid and need cover. Three-to four-foot chicken wire fences prevent this rodent from getting into your garden but only if you also bury your fence one foot deep.

The Massachusetts Master Gardener Association is a non-profit organization whose mission is to share knowledge and experience with the public through outreach programs in education, horticulture and gardening; to provide the Master Gardener Training Program to interested members of the public; and to provide graduates of the Master Gardener Training Program with educational and practical opportunities to extend their knowledge and interests in gardening and related topics. <http://www.massmastergardeners.org/>