



Meadow Vole
Microtus pennsylvanicus

Many clients call us each year complaining of tunnels and damage to their lawn. Usually confused with Moles, these rodents can cause serious damage to turf, ornamental and edible plants as well as trees.

Habits Unlike most mammals, Meadow Voles are active during the day and night, all year-round. They prefer areas with full vegetation, such as a shrub bed. Voles dig many shallow burrows for their underground nests of grass, stems, and leaves. In areas with winter snow, voles will tunnel under the snow pack and feed in elaborate tunnels that become apparent after the spring thaw. Voles are poor climbers and do not usually enter homes or buildings.

Several adults and young may occupy a burrow system. Home-range size varies with habitat quality, food supply, and population levels, but in most cases it is no more than a few hundred square feet. Vole numbers fluctuate from year to year; under favorable conditions their populations can increase rapidly. In some areas their numbers are cyclical, reaching peak numbers every 3 to 6 years before dropping back to low levels. Voles may breed any time of year, but the peak breeding period is spring. Voles are extremely prolific with females maturing in 35 to 40 days and having five to ten litters per year. Litter size ranges from three to six. However, voles seldom live past 12 months of age.

Voles are mostly herbivorous, feeding on a variety of grasses, herbaceous plants, bulbs, and tubers. They eat bark and roots of trees, usually in fall or winter. Voles store seeds and other plant matter in underground chambers. In nature, Voles inhabit meadows or other wild areas. When humans notice them is when they inhabit croplands, buildings, gardens and landscaped sites with protective ground cover. Most problems around homes and gardens occur during outbreaks of vole populations.

Damage Edible Plants-Voles may cause severe damage by feeding on garden vegetables such as artichokes, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, celery, lettuce, turnip, sweet potato, spinach, brussels sprouts and even tomatoes. Turf and other landscape plantings such as lilies and dichondra may be damaged. Voles will gnaw the bark of fruit trees including almond, apple, avocado, cherry, citrus, and olive trees. If voles gnaw completely around the trunk or roots, the tree's flow of nutrients and water will be disrupted; this is called girdling. Girdling damage on trunks and roots can kill trees.

Management and Control To prevent vole damage, you need to manage the population in an area before it reaches high numbers. This can often be achieved by several applications of Rodent Rid, the only EPA approved rodenticide product or removing or reducing the vegetative cover, thus making the area unsuitable to voles.

Please call for more information.