

## Colorado Voles

(Excerpts from Colorado State University Extension and a fact sheet authored by W.F. Andelt, S. Ahmed and K. Jones)

Voles are small rodents measuring 4 to 8 inches, are brown or gray, with pudgy blunt faces and small eyes and sometimes inconspicuous ears, short legs and short tail. They are found in moist meadows and valleys with thick grass, lodgepole pine stands, from 6000 feet to above timberline. They are also available in my yard. Voles, like many small rodents are an important food source for many predators. For example, coyotes, foxes, bobcats and snakes have them on their menu. Voles can cause extensive damage to trees, shrubs and ornamental plantings. They particularly like the bark of young trees but will attack any tree.

Voles often damage lawns and golf courses and neighborhood yards by constructing runways and burrow systems. Planting short grasses that do not mat or lodge, such as buffalo grass, blue grama, or dwarf fescues, will provide a little protective cover and may reduce voles. Damage to lawns can be reduced by close mowing in the fall before snow arrives and by mowing and removing tall grassy cover near lawns. Protecting gardens and trees can be done if you are willing to encircle young trees and shrubs with  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch mesh hardware cloth 3 to 6 inches below ground and 18 inches above ground.

According to the Colorado State University Extension service, there is little one can do to eliminate the precious little creatures. Voles are classified as non-game wildlife in Colorado and may be captured or killed when they create a nuisance or cause property damage. I have tried a couple of things: Repellant from Home Depot (about \$13.00) with little success. Mouse traps (baited with peanut butter) work with average success. I haven't tried a fee paid exterminator but after calling and hearing some prices (\$100 + per visit) without warrantee of success, I decided not to go in that direction. Predator odors, such as the urine from red foxes and coyotes, also may be effective. These odors are not commercially manufactured, but can be purchased from some trapper supply houses. They can be expensive and provide short term protection. They may wash off during rain and must be reapplied periodically. Be careful and aware when using poisons as they may be hazardous to pets, other wildlife and children.

The bad news is that you most likely can't get rid of the creatures but the good news is that some seasons are better than others. The extension service seemed to think that this season wouldn't be too bad, but they haven't seen my yard. Good luck with whatever method you try and if you have one that has been extremely successful, like a fox on a rope, let me know. More info available from [extension.colostate.edu](http://extension.colostate.edu). or call: 970-498-6000 and ask for a Master Gardener. Extension service located at 1525 Blue Spruce Dr., Ft. Collins, CO 80524.