

Trapping to Manage Pocket Gophers

Pocket gophers (*Thomomys* spp.) are one of the most damaging vertebrate pests in California. Gophers are short, stout burrowing rodents, usually 6 to 8 inches long (Fig. 1). They spend most of their time below ground where they use their front legs and large incisors to create extensive burrow systems.

Pocket gophers cause extensive and quite varied forms of damage that includes girdling of stems and vines below ground, consumption of tap roots and aboveground vegetation, and mounding that poses a serious hazard to landscapers, homeowners, and the general public.

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A number of options are available for controlling pocket gophers such as fumigation, toxic baits, and trapping. All three methods have their advantages and could be included in an integrated pest management program for controlling pocket gophers. However, trapping is one of the best methods to use in urban/suburban settings given its high efficacy, minimal risk to children and pets, and lack of potential runoff from gopher-related rodenticides.

Which trap to use?

A number of pocket gopher traps currently are available for purchase including the Macabee®, Gophinator, Cinch, and a variety of box traps (Fig. 2). All can be

effective in a given setting, although some have proven more effective than others. For example, a recent University of California Cooperative Extension study found that the Gophinator trap outperformed the Macabee® trap due to its ability to capture larger gophers at a higher rate; both traps captured small gophers equally well and required an equivalent amount of time to set.

A similar study conducted by the USDA National Wildlife Research Center compared three traps—Macabee®, Cinch, and Blackhole®, a style of box trap. They found the Cinch trap to be most effective, although it took longer to set and required more excavation for placement. Selection of an appropriate trap will vary depending on the user's needs, but the Gophinator trap appears to provide an effective and quick option for gopher control.

Other factors to consider

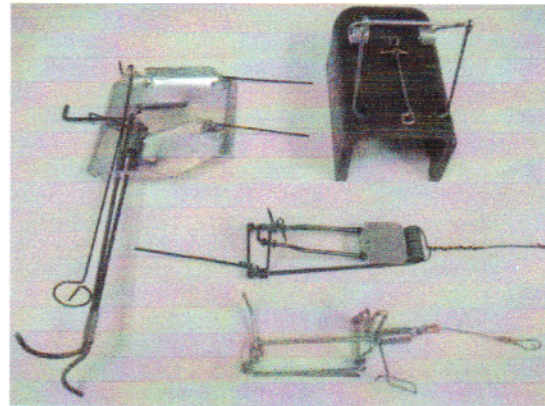
There also has been debate about the need to cover hole openings after setting traps. Recent tests have shown little influence of leaving holes uncovered vs. covering them up. If you are able to leave them uncovered, this will save time in setting and checking traps. However, in many cases, trappers will prefer to cover holes to limit access to pets and children. Clearly, in these cases, covering trap-sets is warranted.

There also appears to be little benefit to using many proposed attractants for gopher trapping, as recent tests comparing trap-sets with no attractant to trap-sets baited with peanut butter, anise oil,



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Figure 1. Pocket gopher (*Thomomys* spp.) excavating its burrow system.



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Figure 2. Types and brands of gopher traps include (clockwise from upper right) Victor® Black Box™, Macabee®, Gophinator, and Cinch.

carrot oil, and a grapefruit-based attractant showed no difference in capture success. This does not preclude potential benefits from other attractants but certainly, at a minimum, indicates that attractants are not needed to effectively capture pocket gophers.

Trapping provides a relatively safe and efficacious approach to pocket gopher control, although it does take practice and patience to become proficient. If you are interested in further details on gopher trapping, check out the UC IPM Pest Note *Pocket Gophers* at <http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn7433.html>.

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