

Yard Pest Comparison Guide: Gophers, Moles, Voles, and Ground Squirrels

Identifying the pest causing damage in your yard is the first step toward controlling it effectively. Gophers, moles, voles, and ground squirrels all have unique behaviors, diets, and signs of damage. This guide breaks down the key differences to help you diagnose the problem quickly.

1. Gophers

Soil & Tunnels:

- Fan- or crescent-shaped mounds typically with no entrance hole.
- Deep feeding tunnels (6–12 inches underground).

Plant Damage:

- Herbivores that chew roots and bulbs.
- Often pull entire plants underground, causing sudden plant loss.

Visibility & Behavior:

- Rarely seen above ground.
- Solitary; burrows mostly hidden.

Key Identifier: Fan-shaped mounds and disappearing plants.



2. Moles

Soil & Tunnels:

- Raised, winding surface ridges or “runways.”
- Volcano-shaped mounds created from deeper tunnel excavation.

Plant Damage:

- Insectivores; feed on earthworms and grubs.
- Minimal direct plant damage.

Visibility & Behavior:

- Rarely seen above ground.
- Solitary and active year-round.

Key Identifier: Raised ridges and volcano-shaped mounds with minimal plant damage.



3. Voles

Soil & Tunnels:

- Narrow surface runways 1–2 inches wide.
- Small, round burrow holes sometimes hidden under mulch or snow.

Plant Damage:

- Herbivores that feed on grass, roots, bulbs, and bark.
- Can girdle trees by chewing bark near the base.

Visibility & Behavior:

- Occasionally seen darting through runways.
- Fast reproduction; populations can increase quickly.

Key Identifier: Narrow grass runways and clusters of small holes.



4. Ground Squirrels

Soil & Tunnels:

- Open burrow holes 3–4 inches wide with no soil mounds.
- Simple burrow systems used for nesting and escape.

Plant Damage:

- Omnivores; eat seeds, vegetables, fruits, and occasionally bark.
- Chew plants above ground rather than pulling them underground.

Visibility & Behavior:

- Frequently seen above ground.
- Live in colonies and are highly active during daylight.

Key Identifier: Open holes with visible daytime foraging activity.



Comparison Table

Pest	Soil Mounds	Surface Trails	Plant Damage	Bark Chewing	Seen Above Ground
Gopher	Fan-shaped w/ plug	No	Severe	Rare	No
Mole	Volcano-shaped	Raised ridges	Minimal	No	No
Vole	None	Narrow runways	Moderate-Severe	Yes	Occasionally
Ground Squirrel	None	None	Moderate-Severe	Yes	Yes

Quick Identification Cheat Sheet

- Fan-shaped mound without an entrance hole → Gopher
- Raised ridges + volcano mounds → Mole
- Narrow runways + clusters of small holes → Vole
- Open burrows + daytime sightings → Ground Squirrel

Tips for Homeowners

- Walk your property weekly to spot early changes.
- Look closely at soil movement, plant health, and tree bases.
- Document signs with photos before taking control measures.
- Use Stink Stakes to move any of these critters away from valuable trees and plants. Visit <https://www.stinkstake.com/>.