

*How to Deter Voles  
and Mice from the*

# EDIBLE GARDEN

Ag *for* Life



# How to Deter Voles and Mice From the Edible Garden



If you notice bite marks in some of your summer squash, cucumbers, and other plants, or you spot peeled, or gnawed bark at the base of your fruit trees or shrubs, it is possible that voles or mice are to blame. Other telltale signs include small holes dug in your garden beds, or mounds of excrement. You may see evidence of underground vole tunnels beneath lawns adjacent to the garden. Sometimes voles will eat the seedlings of plants, quite literally yanking the plants underground. These tiny rodents can do a fair amount of damage in the edible garden, as well as to trees, shrubs, and the lawn. Mice, in particular, may also make their way inside your home, where they are very unwelcome.



# Common Species of Mice and Voles

There are several species of mice and voles in Canada, but the most common ones on the prairies are house mice (*Mus musculus*), deer mice (*Peromyscus maniculatus*), and meadow voles (*Microtus pennsylvanicus*). House mice are the smallest of the three. They are light grey or brown in colour, with a pointed muzzle and a long tail. Deer mice are larger than house mice and are easy to spot due to their white abdomens. They are more common in rural areas than in urban centres. Meadow voles are dark brown in colour, with a sturdy, squat body shape and a short tail.

## How to Deter Mice and Voles

Voles like to dig beneath the snow during the winter. To survive the cold months, they munch on tree bark and trunks at ground level. They may also burrow underground and chew on the roots of trees and shrubs. They can inflict significant injury to the plants, girdling the stems and root systems and choking off the plant's supply to nutrients and water. Mow your lawn short in the fall before freeze-up. This will discourage voles from using the tall grass as a hiding spot. They will tend to move on and leave your trees alone. It's a good idea to protect the trunks of your trees during the winter. You can purchase wire mesh guards to wrap around the tree to keep voles away. Sink the guards into the soil about 15 centimetres (6 inches) to prevent digging.

Voles do not like to climb, so planting your edible crops in tall containers and raised beds may discourage or limit their activity during the growing season.



To reduce the number of safe spaces where mice and voles feel comfortable in your yard, remove piles of plant wastes and discarded items such as old furniture. Move wood piles frequently so that the rodents don't think of them as safe spaces. Check your compost bins regularly to ensure mice and voles aren't using them as a base of operations. Turn the compost every week and use the garden hose to add water from time to time – not only are these actions good for making compost, but the disturbance will hopefully frighten the rodents.

Clean up all plant litter in the autumn, including fallen leaves and fruit. If you have bird feeders, remove all spilled seed.

The presence of dogs and cats – even if they are in runs or catios – near the home and garden may work to deter mice and voles, who won't go near anything scented by a predator. Your pets may not actually have to catch the rodents to be useful in discouraging them from the property.

If you see holes leading to underground dens or tunnels, it may work to place the garden hose inside and run water to flood the hole. This may make the voles move away and leave your home and garden alone.

## Controlling Voles and Mice

If repellants are not working and you find it necessary to control the population of mice and voles, an effective option is to go to your local hardware store and stock up on snap traps. Peanut butter is the bait of choice. Place the traps near any visible tunnels or holes, around the perimeter of garden beds, and near entry points of outbuildings and your home. Check and empty the traps daily. If you have children or pets, keep them away from traps.



