

Voluminous Voles

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Like General Custer at the battle of Little Big Horn, it was just a case of “too many Indians.” That’s exactly why rose growers experience the scourge of the pesky little rodent named the vole. These varmints create much havoc in the lawns and gardens when they invade the territory.

Speaking of the great volume of voles that ravage rose gardens, one needs to know the prolific multiplicity of these troublesome critters. Their birth rate is astounding. Requiring a gestation period of just 21 days, it is easy to see why so many exist. Then too, only 40 days is required before the litter reaches the reproductive stage of life. A female vole can have as many as twelve litters of voles per year. That’s a real prolific birth explosion when as many as ten are born in each litter. The life cycle of a vole is short, rarely reaching one year of age. Their chief cause of death is not from disease, but from predatory action of hawks, owls, bobcats, foxes, snakes, and various other predators.

There is a definite difference in the eating habits of the mole and that of the vole. The slightly larger mole, although quite harmful, gets blamed for the ravages created by his look-a-like, the vole. Rosarians all across the USA have experienced vole damage to rose roots that become tasty meals for these rodents. Although being only 4 to 5 inches in size, their appetite for food is astounding. They can easily eat their body weight daily. To know on rose bush roots with well-equipped teeth structure often means demise for the bush. Voles are equipped with clawed feet that enable them to burrow the soil with much success. Tunnels or runways, as they are called, are dug to enable passage to their intended food source. They often use the tunnels that have been dug by their “twin” rodents, the moles. Moles are seeking earthworms, grubs, and other non-vegetative morsels.

There are several species of voles worldwide with over 20 types present in the USA. Two of these – the meadow

vole and the pine vole - have different foraging habits. The meadow vole stays mainly above ground and emits damage to vegetative growth. However, pine voles do their “dirty” work primarily underground, traversing the tunnels in search of any tasty roots of plants that can be found. Piles of soil, dug from the tunnels, are indications that vole activity has probably taken place. The ground is usually spongy where vole activity is present.

Since vole activity is year-long, it is prudent that control measures be performed diligently to eliminate this scourge. These creatures, with so great a birth rate, require continued control-measures. Various types of control are available to the rosarian. Traps and poisons are two of the methods that are successful. However, “fear” of predatory action is the chief defense against vole invasion. The many predatory animals that feast on voles put them in constant danger. For that reason, the average life span is less than a year. Capitalizing on this “fear” tactic, the rosarian is best prepared to prevent vole invasion. Several products that contain predator scent are available on the market. One such product is Shake-Away Rodent Repellent. Its makers claim it is a safe repellent that is completely organic. Utilizing the scent of fox urine, one of the vole’s chief predators, the rosarian is providing nature’s most effective vehicle against vole invasion. The powder is sprinkled in the rose bed area, creating a scent that spells fear in the minds of these destructive critters, causing them to vacate the area. This repelling product is available at garden centers or on the Internet.

Traps are another method of exterminating voles. Placing the baited trap in the entrances of the tunnels often spells doom for the invading mammals. Apples slices, peanut butter, and other foodstuffs lure the voles to the traps very effectively. If toxic chemicals are used, be extremely careful in this method. Pets and children are to be protected from this poisonous application.

Just as the rosarian must be diligent

in providing preventive measures against plant diseases, that same method of control must be utilized against vole activity. It is the most effective control measure available. Never provide a prime nesting area for voles. Compost piles located near rose beds is an invitation to vole habitation. Keep the rose bed area clean of debris that is attractive to voles. Excessive mulch around the trunk area of rose bushes is a greeting card to the critters. These little burrowing creatures will invade areas that present protection against predators.

Not much has been written concerning voles. These are very destructive pests that can cause havoc to a rose garden. Keep on the alert for signs of vole presence. If any symptoms of their presence are discovered, exert immediate action to control their destructive activity. Your roses will applaud your action.



Vole



Mole