

Year Round Gardening

Colorado Master Gardener Address Wildlife Questions

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Colorado State University Extension Colorado Master Gardeners are trained to answer your lawn and garden questions. In El Paso County, several Colorado Master Gardeners have also received training in answering urban wildlife questions.

As neighborhoods within Colorado Springs and surrounding areas continue to grow, the wildlife habitat has been impacted, displacing animals. In most situations humans and animals have adapted and co-exist.

The most common questions are about voles and gophers. There is not one unique solution to these problem animals. Rather, a property owner should employ several methods. For example, damage caused by pocket gophers can be reduced by exclusion (use of hardware cloth as a barrier), habitat modification, trapping and toxicants. Not all methods will work for all property owners. Property owners with small children and/or pets may chose not to use toxicants. I found another method to successfully manage voles is with a garage/barn cat. Our family cat Lester, pictured, really digs in to vole management. Within several months of Lester's arrival, the damage to landscape plantings like ice plant, Virginia creeper, junipers and catmint was noticeably reduced. Not everyone wants to add a feline to the family, but this has been a very successful method for us.



Lester in vole mode

Recently, a property owner called and described areas of digging in his lawn. This was an excellent clue. Skunks will dig in lawns and gardens while looking for grubs. The digging usually results in small 3-4 inch cone-shaped holes or patches of upturned earth. Porcupines will often clip twigs on trees and the twigs are readily seen on fresh snow.

There are some benefits to having wildlife around. Gophers add to soil fertility when they burrow and add organic material (feces). Burrowing also increases soil aeration. Skunks can help to control insect and small mammal populations. However, rabid skunks have been found in El Paso county already this season so be wary. The presence of voles on your property might help to keep owls in the area. Adding deer- and rabbit-resistant plantings to your landscape can result in a more interesting landscape. You may also be attracting beneficial insects and pollinators to your property with the addition of the plantings. Porcupines are not particularly wary and make great subjects for nature photographers.

The Colorado Master Gardeners with wildlife training can provide advice on how best to manage your urban wildlife issues. When you have questions, Colorado State University Extension has research based answers Get answers to your horticulture questions at www.Ask.Extension.org or by emailing CSUmg2@elpasoco.com. Find out about classes and other events at <http://elpaso.extension.colostate.edu/>.