



ask Celebrating 21 Years! the landscape professional Linda K. Lillie of Sprigs & Twigs

Welcome to my weekly series!

Email or mail your questions to: info@sprigsandtwigs.net or
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Thank you Readers for Voting Sprigs & Twigs
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Question this Week: *Hi Linda – something is eating my plants! I noticed some of my perennials started to look poorly and when I touched them, they fell over and had no roots! Help! ...Ruby*

Linda's Answer:

Sounds like voles have found your garden! Voles are rodents that are in the same family as rats and mice (voles look like a mouse with a shorter tail). Voles are "herbivores" that eat tender green vegetation, grasses, bulbs, roots and occasionally insects. Beds of Pachysandra, Myrtle or other evergreen ground covers are perfect places for voles to live (and eat). During the growing season, if you pull up a plant and it has no roots, you have been visited by a vole. Voles are active all year long, day and night; they travel in shallow tunnels just below the surface or in passages through the grass above ground. They have also been known to use pre-existing mole tunnels. In the winter, it was common to see passageways going every which way through the grass just below the snow cover. Voles are mammals and they are the favorite snack of almost every carnivore, which explains why they have evolved to be such prolific breeders. Voles can breed almost any time of year and have been known to have upwards of a dozen litters a year. Female voles can reproduce when they are one month old, their gestation period is only 3 weeks long and their litters can have 10 or more offspring. That's a lot of voles! For some reason, every 4 years or so, unusually large numbers of voles are produced with a corresponding increase in yard and garden damage. Judging from the number of recent calls and emails I have received, I would imagine this is one of those big years! The weather this past winter has contributed. The ground did not freeze deeply and voles could tunnel easily and the snow cover shielded them from predators. So what can you do about them? One method is to do nothing and let Mother Nature take charge and the vole predators will do their thing. If you can't wait for that to happen, your best bet is to use regular mouse traps, baited with peanut butter. Place the mouse trap perpendicular to the vole runway and cover it with a protective cardboard box or large flower pot. If you can locate their underground access holes, which are normally 1-2" in diameter, place your mouse traps nearby. You are better off placing many traps rather than just one. Check the traps several times a day and keep trapping until you stop catching them. "Voles" are very different from "moles", which I'll explain in next week's article. Good luck.



A vole

Linda K. Lillie has been President of Sprigs & Twigs, Inc. for the last 21 years. She is a graduate of Connecticut College in Botany, an accredited NOFA Organic Land Care Professional, a Connecticut Master Gardener and a national award winning landscape designer for her design and installation projects..

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