



# Welcome to my weekly series! ASK THE LANDSCAPE PROFESSIONAL

Linda K. Lillie of Sprigs & Twigs

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Good morning, I was out in my yard in Old Saybrook, CT yesterday and found these tracks in the lawn. Are they from some kind of mole? What do I need to fix this? Thank you very much and I enjoy your column very much. - Jim



What you are seeing are the surface trails created by Meadow Voles. Voles are rodents that are in the same family as rats and mice (voles look like a mouse, but 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 hide, 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's common to see passageways going every which way through the grass just below the snow cover as you show in your picture. Voles are mammals and 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 I have received, I would imagine this is one of those big years! The weather this winter has contributed. The ground has not frozen deeply and voles can tunnel easily and there has been snow cover to shield 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, some people have reported having luck with regular mouse traps, baited with peanut butter. Place the mouse trap perpendicular to the vole runway. 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. Late winter or fall is the easiest time of year to trap them. Good luck.



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