

## **Voles vs. Moles: What's the Difference?**

### Common Culprits of Lawn Damage & How to Tell Them Apart

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Moles and voles are small creatures that live underground and can cause significant damage to your lawn. While moles tunnel through the soil, disrupting your yard, voles create burrows and paths beneath the surface, also leading to a messy yard. Although these animals might seem similar, understanding the differences between them is crucial for effective control. To address issues caused by voles or moles, you need to identify which one is affecting your property.

Here's how to tell the difference between voles and moles.



### **Differences: Appearance and Characteristics**

Voles (Cricetidae) and moles (Talpidae) look different, eat different diets, and have little else in common other than their rhyming names. So, how do you know if it's a vole or a mole? Both are furry little creatures that burrow underground and can damage landscaping. Here are some of their key characteristics:



### **Vole**

- Closely resembles a 5- to 8-inch field mouse; often called a "meadow mouse"; vegetarian
- Body type: Short tail, compact body, small eyes
- Spends most of its life above ground, although it burrows and makes underground nests
- Has long, prominent orange teeth for eating vegetation



### **Mole**

- 4 to 7 inches long; insectivore
- Body type: Elongated head and snout with no visible eyes or ears (hidden under fur); cylindrical body with short, stocky limbs; stubby tail
- Spends almost all of its time underground, thus requiring extra eye and ear protection
- Large paddle-like forefeet with long claws for extensive tunnel digging and insect hunting

### **How Voles and Moles Damage Lawns**

Moles are carnivores. They are not rodents like voles. A mole will eat worms, grubs, and adult insects. Voles eat a vegetarian diet and often attack garden plants. So if a pest takes bites out of your plants, you can rule out moles. Signs of a vole in your yard are similar to a field mouse—eaten vegetation, runways, and small hideout holes by the base of a tree.

### **Vole vs. Mole: Tunnels and Runways**

Although they don't eat plants, mole tunnels cause damage by disturbing the root systems of plants growing above them, thereby wreaking havoc on the landscape. Mole tunnels go deep, sometimes up to 10 inches deep, and are part of an intricate underground network. Voles do not tunnel like moles. While voles occasionally tunnel underground, searching for food, they more commonly create runways on the surface that make for an unsightly lawn.

### **Vole vs. Mole: Holes and Mounds**

Moles form big volcano-looking molehill mounds. Voles don't make mounds, but they make underground burrows in the form of a small hole, usually at the base of a tree. They commonly damage trees and shrubs by burrowing into their root systems, causing young specimens to experience die-back or to begin to lean. Voles gnaw at the base of a tree or shrub, especially in winter. To prevent this type of vole damage, install metal guards around the base of vegetation. A vole may also damage flower bulbs and potatoes in the garden. But mainly, the vole will eat the stems and blades of lawn grass.

## How to Control Moles and Voles

If you have moles or voles in your yard, there are a few ways to try to control the situation and eradicate the animals from your yard.

### Vole vs. Mole: Traps

Traps are the preferred way to get rid of voles and moles since using pesticides or rodenticides can potentially affect other animals in the delicate ecosystem. Knowing the difference between a mole and a vole is essential because if you want to catch the critter you have, you need to know what will attract them to your trap. For example, a vole may be attracted to peanut butter as bait, while a mole will not care for it. Most mole traps don't need bait; they only require positioning at the entrance of an active molehill.

### Vole vs. Mole: Deterrent Plants

Voles and moles will stay away from certain plants due to their smell. For moles, try plants including garlic, marigolds, alliums, shallots, and daffodils. Voles will stay away from alliums. Plant these around the border of your garden to deter moles and voles. Vinegar can also be used as a deterrent.

### Vole vs. Mole: Castor Oil

You can use both liquid or granular castor oil to repel both voles and moles. It does not harm them, but they do not like the smell, and it does cause some digestive distress in moles. Apply it all over your yard to keep these pests away.

