

Trapping Gophers

Successful trapping or hand baiting depends on accurately locating the gopher's active tunnel system which is usually 6 and 12 inches deep. The crescent-shaped mounds visible aboveground are connected to this burrow by lateral tunnels. Because the lateral tunnels are plugged by the gopher, trapping and baiting in them is not as successful. Two common traps are the two-pronged pincher trap and the squeeze-type box trap. These traps are triggered when the gopher pushes against a flat vertical pan or wire trigger. To locate the main burrow, use 1/4" diameter probe. Gopher probes are commercially available or can be constructed from a pipe, wooden dowel, or stick. Look for the freshest mounds because they indicate an area of recent gopher activity. You will usually see a small circle or depression on the mound representing the plugged lateral tunnel. This plug is generally bordered on one side by soil, making the mound crescent shaped. Begin probing 8 to 12 inches from the plug side of the mound. When the probe penetrates the gopher's burrow, it should drop suddenly about 2 inches. Often, the main burrow will go between two mounds. To locate the gopher's main burrow you will probably have to probe repeatedly, but your skill will improve with experience. Several types and brands of gopher traps are available. After you have located the main tunnel, open it with a shovel or garden trowel and set traps in pairs facing opposite directions. This placement will intercept a gopher coming from either end of the burrow. The box type is easier for most trappers to set but requires more excavation. Box traps are especially useful when the gopher's main burrow is small (less than 3 inches in diameter) because small burrows must be enlarged to accommodate wire pincher traps. All traps should be wired to stakes so you won't lose track of them. After setting the traps, exclude light from the burrow by covering the opening with dirt clods, sod, cardboard, or some other material. Fine soil can be sifted around the edges to ensure a light-tight seal. If light enters, the gopher may plug the burrow with soil, filling the traps and making them ineffective. Check traps often and reset them when necessary. If no gopher is caught within 3 days, reset the traps in a different location. Remove and bury dead gophers or place them in plastic bags in the trash. Do not handle without rubber gloves. Human odor on traps has no apparent affect on trapping success.