

# Pocket Gopher Biology and Management

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## Pocket Gophers



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## Pocket Gopher Adaptations

- Chewing, chisel-like teeth that are exposed when the mouth is closed.
- Dig tunnels (burrows) with powerful forequarters and large-clawed front paws.
- Fine, short, dense fur that sheds water and soil.
- Small eyes and ears.
- Highly sensitive facial whiskers and similar hairs on the tail that assist moving about in the dark.
- We do not have moles in Arizona.

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### Pocket Gophers



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### Pocket Gopher Biology - Reproduction

- Active year-round at any hour of day or night.
- Live alone except when breeding and rearing young.
- Reach sexual maturity at one year.
- Breed in winter or spring, upto 3 litters per year of 5 to 6 young.
- Young are born hairless

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### Pocket Gophers - Young



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**Pocket Gopher Biology - Burrows**

- Burrow system covers between 200 to 2,000 sq. ft.
- Burrows 2 ½ to 3 ½ inches diameter
- Feeding burrows 6 to 12 inches deep.
- Nest and food storage can be as deep as 6 feet.
- Sealed (plugged) burrow openings
- Many lateral tunnels facilitate pushing soil out of main burrow and feeding.

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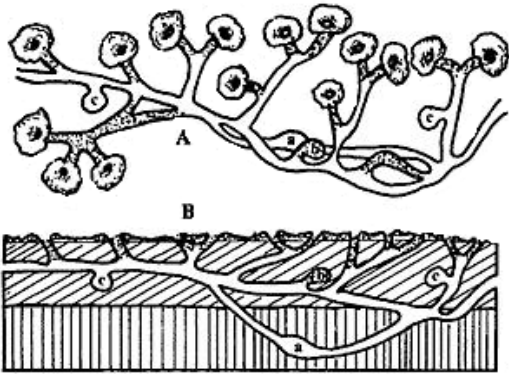
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**Pocket Gophers - Burrows**



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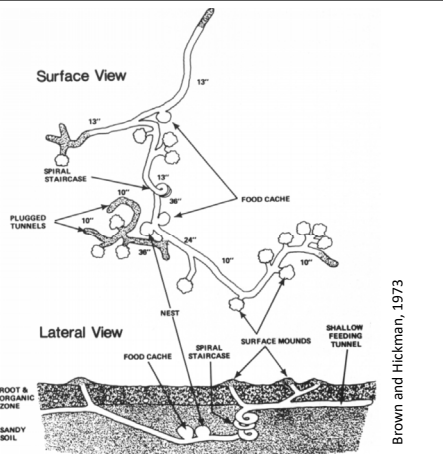
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**Pocket Gophers - Burrows**



Brown and Hickman, 1973

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### Pocket Gopher Biology - Feeding

- Herbivores – generally prefer herbaceous plants, shrubs, and trees.
- Use sense of smell to locate food.
- Usually feed below ground, but will feed above ground but only a body length or so away from burrow.
- May pull entire plants into the burrow.
- May chew on poly water lines or drip irrigation.

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### Pocket Gopher Mouth Arrangement



Fur-lined, external cheek pouches

Mouth closed, teeth exposed

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### Pocket Gopher Management

- In Arizona, it is legal to trap and bait pocket gophers.
- Exclusion: Hardware cloth 2 ft underground, 1 ft above ground with 6 inches bent 90 degrees away from planting.
- Locate burrows with a probe.
- Baiting with toxic materials is not recommended for home gardeners – it could cause secondary or non-target mortality.

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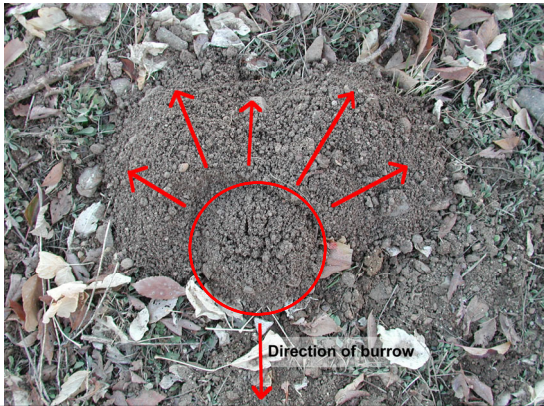
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**Pocket Gopher Mound Showing Plug**



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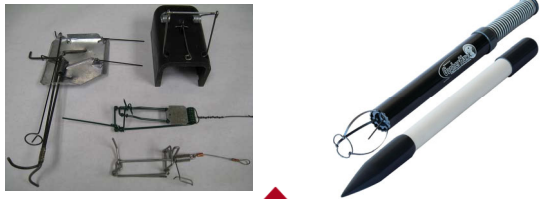
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**Pocket Gopher Management (cont.)**

- Trapping is a safe, effective, and humane method of managing gophers.
- Three general type of traps:
  - Box traps
  - Body gripping traps (Macabee type)
  - Choker-style traps (GopherHawk)



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**Pocket Gopher Management (cont.)**

- Baiting of traps is not recommended.
- Human scent is not an issue.
- Tie two traps with wire to a stake.
- Set traps along the main tunnel in two directions.
- Cover traps to limit air flow.
- Set traps and check every 1-2 days. Reset in different location if there is no activity.
- After gopher has been caught, collapse burrows and fill with soil using a garden hose to prevent recolonization.

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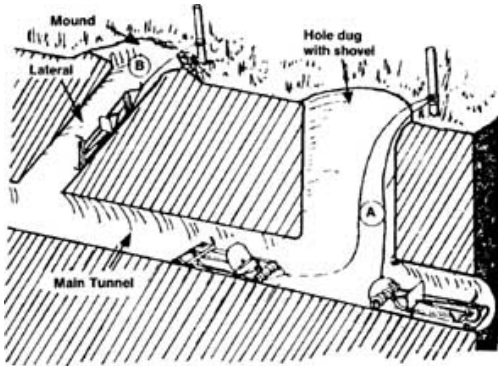
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### Pocket Gopher Trapping Diagram



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### Pocket Gopher Management (cont.)

- There is no scientific evidence that repellents work on pocket gophers. This includes: Juicy Fruit Gum, human hair, pet waste, chocolate Ex-Lax, high frequency sound/vibration, and others.
- Flood irrigation can cause gophers to move making them accessible to predators such as Great Blue Herons.
- Smoke and explosive devices are also used but are not supported by research and may be dangerous.

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### Homemade Pocket Gopher Smoke Device



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**Pocket Gopher Follow-Up**

- Monitor previously infested areas for new activity.
- Minimize weeds and debris so you can see new mounds.
- Adjacent vacant lots and open areas can allow gophers to quickly access your property.
- Be prepared to take immediate action – a new colony is easier to manage than an established one.

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