

Voles



During late March and April we get many calls about vole damage in turfgrass. The vole constructs well-defined, visible surface runways through turf areas, measuring about 1.5"-2" in width. It is the sight of these paths that cause homeowners concern in March and April. Vole runways in turf are formed by a combination of the vole eating the grass blades, and the constant traveling over the runway. Voles also spread excavated dirt from the burrow system in the runway, resulting in a dirt-bare path in some areas.

Voles are commonly mistaken for Moles. Unlike voles, moles prefer to eat earthworms or grubs (Vole = Vegetarian; Mole = Meat eater). Where vole trails are commonly seen on the surface of the grass: mole tunnels are actually under the turf itself, resulting in a spongy or squishy feeling when walking across them. Voles had a great winter. These small, seed- and root-eating rodents don't venture out in the open lawn during the growing season because hawks and predator birds swoop down on them. But under snow cover in winter, they can wander all over, eating grass roots and making those surface ruts. Now that the snow is gone, the tunneling will stop. Voles will stick to their growing-season homes under shrubs and groundcovers and along walls.

Voles can cause quite a mess under the snow, but the problem is temporary and not usually something that needs to be addressed. The damage will recover with some time and a light raking around mid-April to remove any dead grass. Voles only make the trails like in the pictures, and do not make raised dirt tunnels, or mounds like moles do.

