

# **Bait Stations for Winter Vole Control in Residential Areas and Landscapes**

*By Sherman Takatori, ISDA*

Meadow voles cause significant damage to orchards, nurseries, turf farms, ornamental flower plantings, landscapes, lawns, and vegetable gardens. Most damage caused by voles is the result of feeding activity. Voles weigh 3 to 4½ oz and can eat nearly their own body weight daily when vegetation is available. Voles damage plants by feeding on roots and stems, leaves, seeds, and underground reproductive structures such as bulbs and tubers. They damage and kill trees and shrubs by girdling and removing the bark from the trunk or stems near the base and this is especially true during the winter months.

Damage to trees and shrubs normally occurs in the winter when voles are foraging under snow cover. Normally, damage to landscape trees and shrubs can be limited by use of barrier materials, such as screens or wire mesh, to prevent the voles from damaging the trees/shrubs by their feeding activities. 3/8-inch netted wire extending at least 4 inches below the soil surface and above the snow level in the wintertime is sufficient to reduce or eliminate vole damage provided there are no breaks in the barrier. However, if you have extensive landscapes, trees or shrubs, this type of barrier exclusion may not be practical.

Baits are often used for vole control and can be effective in limiting or reducing the population of voles. In residential situations, bait stations are often required for bait applications whether they are lawns/turfs, shrubs, trees or flower beds.

Baits should be started in the fall to reduce the population of voles before winter and snow fall. Usually, the rodenticide's pesticide label has requirements for the use and placement of bait stations used in residential areas and landscapes. Most labels state that bait stations must be durable, protect the rodenticide bait from the effects of weather, are tamper-resistant, and are secured to either a structure or to the ground to prevent removal by livestock, domestic animals or wildlife. Commercially available bait stations are available through various pest control sources for use with the different types of baits available. The publication, PNW 627 "*Meadow Voles and Pocket Gophers: Management in Lawns, Gardens and Cropland*" is an excellent publication to get information on meadow vole control and has a diagram on how to build your own bait station that may be used in and around your residence. If you wish to use this or any other type of bait station in the winter time after snow fall, make sure that you mark the position of the stations so you can check on the bait station's condition and replenish bait if necessary. This can be easily done with a long stick or marking flag that is higher than the snow level.

The number of bait stations that you need for adequate control of voles in the fall and winter months depend upon the severity of the infestation and other environmental factors. Even with moderate vole numbers, damage to landscapes can be significant. A combination of mechanical barriers and bait stations will normally provide the most cost-effective vole damage reduction on most landscapes. Use barriers around trees, shrubs and flower beds when practical. Provide bait stations in the areas that are the most likely to be entry areas for voles. Places where turf or shrub/tree areas border fields, meadows, vacant lots, or public lands are prime areas where voles can enter into landscapes. A good strategy is to place bait stations so that they will intercept a majority of the voles entering into the landscape area. Again, the spacing and amount of bait

stations will depend upon the severity of infestations. A suggestion would be to start by placing stations between 15 and 20 feet apart in probable vole entry areas and 30 feet in areas where vole entry numbers will be low. If done properly, the perimeter of the landscapes or turf areas should be sufficient to prevent extensive damage to interior landscape areas.

Remember that voles are active year-around and will actively forage for food throughout winter months. It is important that you check the conditions of your bait station occasionally to make sure they are in good condition and are adequately supplied with bait. As with all pesticides, it is important to ***read and understand the pesticide label*** to ensure you are making a proper pesticide application. Most rodenticides for vole control in residential areas will have very specific instructions so domestic animals, children, pets and wildlife will not be affected by the placement of baits. Make sure you follow all label instructions! If you have questions on baits, bait stations or other control methods, contact your local University Extension Educator or your local Department of Agriculture representative. They will make sure you have the correct information for controlling voles and limiting their damage.

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