As the weather starts to warm up, so do some of our little, furry friends who have been quietly busy underground in our yards and fields. Some of the more obnoxious yard and garden pests are gophers and moles. I have battled them both in my yard and vegetable garden as well as in the field and I think the score is about tied at this point. But I am an educated and highly-trained Oregon State University Extension Agent and no gopher or mole is going to get the best of me and that is a fact. The only problem is that they do not seem know that.

For those of you who struggle with gophers and moles in your yards, gardens or pastures, there are a few things to keep in mind. The first is to make sure you know who your enemy is. Remember that mole mounds are circular shaped like little volcanoes with the plug for the tunnel in the middle of the mound. On the other hand, the gopher creates a fan shaped mound with the tunnel plug in the side of the mound.

The feeding habits for both moles and gophers can cause a lot of damage. Gophers like to chew on roots from a number of plants including trees, shrubs, grasses, grains and a number of vegetables. Moles like gophers have a varied diet and like to eat tulips, lilies, iris, carrots, potatoes, peas beans and a number of other crops. Moles also like to eat worms, insects and other
soil creatures, which have benefits in reducing insect problems in the yard. The burrowing activities of both of these little furry friends can do a lot of damage to crops and fields. They can cause a lot of frustration when a particular mole, who will remain unnamed, has filled my sprinkler control boxes with soil on two occasions. That is not the way to make friends, to say the least. There are several controls that you can buy or try that claim to control moles and gophers, ranging from flooding their tunnels, removing food sources, to setting up perches for predatory birds. Some work better than others. Poison baits and traps are the most reliable control and can be purchased locally. As with any pesticide, but particularly those for rodent control, always carefully follow the label to avoid potential hazards to pets, wildlife, the applicator and others. Poison baits tend to work better with gophers as opposed to moles. Moles, as mentioned, like to eat earthworms and other soil creatures so baits may not be as effective as with gophers, leaving traps as a better bet. I have also had some success on a limited scale in dealing with gophers and moles in my garden and field with a battery operated device that emits sonic vibrations in the soil. The vibrations seem to drive off moles and gophers but do not kill them, which may or may not solve the problem over the long-term and may not be suitable in all situations. Again, I offer this as only one option and not as an official recommendation. I caution folks to look at options that are tried and tested.

For those who want additional information on how to deal with gophers, moles and other nuisance wildlife, both Oregon State University and Washington State University offer some excellent publications. Their websites can be found at http://eesc.oregonstate.edu/ for Oregon State University and http://pubs.wsu.edu/cgi-bin/pubs/index.html for Washington State University. There is also an excellent web site put out by the University of Nebraska titled “The Internet Center for Wildlife Damage Management” that has a host of publications and hints on handling wildlife damage issues. (http://wildlifedamage.unl.edu)