

### COASTAL GARDENER COLUMN

**Franklin Laemmlen, Ph.D.**

**Q:** Within the last few weeks I have had several gophers take up residence in my yard. This has never happened before. I live “in town,” several blocks from any fields or vacant lots. Please help.

**A:** You are the victim of the “spring dispersal.” Gophers do not hibernate, they are active all year-round. The female usually mates in late winter, and a litter of five to six young is produced. These young are weaned in about 90 days.

Gophers are solitary animals, i.e., one per burrow system except when mating or raising young. Therefore, when the young are weaned, the mother “kicks” them out of her burrow system, and they disperse to new sites to establish a new burrow of their own.

Your garden was obviously picked as a new residence site by a young gopher.

If you find the new home site soon after it is established, you can often flood the gopher out with a garden hose. Trapping is also possible. Open the burrow and set two traps facing in opposite directions in the tunnel. Baits are also available. They need to be placed in the burrow at several locations so the gopher has easy access. Smoke bombs can also be used. However, gophers will quickly wall off a section of their burrow if they sense danger, so smoke bombs can be limited in effectiveness.

One last comment: the gophers will not go away by themselves, especially if you have a nice lawn and many succulent garden plants on which to forage. Gopher control must be aggressive and continuous until you have eliminated the intruder. For a complete discussion of gophers, their habits and management, contact the Coastal Gardener for a free brochure.

**Q:** The neighbor has several cats. These cats have decided that my garden is nicer than their own yard. They take naps in my flower beds and use other parts of my front yard for their toilet. What can I do to keep these pesky animals in their own yard or at least out of mine?

**A:** There are several repellents available which can be sprinkled or sprayed on plants and soil surfaces to repel cats. These products have an odor which cats find objectionable.

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Unfortunately, these products need to be reapplied frequently to remain effective.

Reapplication is necessary after rain, sprinkler runs or even heavy dew. Another problem is that in time the cats may adapt to the smell and ignore it.

I do not know how desperate you are, but an “electronic fence” may be the answer. You indicated that your dog hates cats, but he is confined to the backyard. If you fit your dog with a collar and then put the electronic fence around your front yard, your dog can be confined to your yard (front and back) and keep the cats out.

Finally, you might try motion sensors which set off a sprinkler. My neighbor has one of these to keep birds out of their fish pond. The motion sensors and attached sprinklers are set in strategic locations in the yard. Whenever the sensor detects motion within its radius of influence, the sprinkler is turned on for a few seconds to shoo the intruder away.

Check with your veterinarian or a pet supply store concerning the above products.

Send your landscape and garden questions to: **The Coastal Gardener, 624-A West Foster Road, Santa Maria, CA 93455.**