

DIGGING IN

At Troy Community Gardens
Madison, WI

Invasion of the Voles

By Kurt Schneider

There is no doubt that voles have become a major problem this year. You can see the furry little residents of Troy Gardens scurrying along their favored "runways" between burrow and food supplies anytime you walk through the gardens. Voles, also known as meadow mice, love grains, legumes and potatoes but will eat almost anything. They thrive in an environment that supplies cover from predators such as hawks, foxes or cats. This would include high grass or vegetation, straw, hay or leaf litter. It's no wonder they find our gardens attractive.

Recorded as having up to 17 litters per year in captivity, in the wild it's more like one to five and with three to four babies per litter. Still that leaves plenty



of them to ravage our crops. Plus a healthy vole can eat the equivalent of its weight daily.

What have others tried?

The number one prescription for eliminating a vole infestation is to remove their food supply and their preferred habitat. Other options are reducing the population through various methods. Also, the use of deterrents or physical barriers can be useful.

Removing their food supply: This option is obviously impossible in our large community garden.

Mitigating their habitat: This poses a number of difficulties considering the practice of composting on site and the use of mulch to control weeds and conserve moisture.

Reducing the population: This is obviously desirable if done to a sufficient degree. The methods can range from poisoning using any number of rodenticides, lethal traps and live traps.

Poisons: The EPA considers all rodenticides to pose a hazard to any mammalian or avian predators or scavengers that feed on the targeted rodent. Hawks for instance, which are fabulous predators, will scavenge dead prey animals if available. We'd hate to poison

our hawks, owls, eagles or foxes which are our allies against these critters. Some sources have suggested that feeding gummy bears or chewing gum to voles is fatal and would not likely be a hazard to the secondary feeders.

Lethal traps: There are a variety of options within this category, all posing a similar outcome.

A commonly recommended lethal trap is a simple gripping trap such as a mouse or rat trap. Baited with a favorite food such as peanut butter, oat meal or apple is effective. Death is often quick in

WORK DAY

SATURDAY

July 21

9 AM - 12 NOON

If it is raining on July 21, the work day will be changed to July 22, 9 a.m.

Hnub ua haujlwm pab dawb yog 7/21/12, 9 a.m. txog 12 teev tavs, yog los nag muab pauv rau 7/22/12 9 a.m.

Día de Trabajo

El Sábado 21 de julio 9 a.m. -12 medio día

Si llegara a llover el 21 de julio, el día de trabajo será cambiado para el día 22 de julio 9 a.m.

that the striker can break the rodent's back, but there is evidence that voles will, over time, realize these as threats and totally avoid them.

The Bucket of Death trap or some variation is a homemade drowning trap that has been demonstrated to be very effective with other rodents. Basically it lures the targeted rodent to fall into a bucket of water, leaving it unable to extricate itself. The most common variation lures the rodent by floating sunflower seeds in a 2/3 filled five gallon bucket, effectively hiding the water underneath. Once in, the victim can't get

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out. Not the most humane but could be very effective if the voles cooperate.

Glue board traps can be placed along the voles "runway" and once stuck to the glue result in starvation or capture by predator.

Live traps: The quintessential live trap is the Havahart trap. This is obviously the most humane trapping option, but it would be expensive to secure a sufficient number of traps, and it would take forever to reduce the population significantly. You're still left with the issue of where to relocate the critters.

Deterrents: Predator urine is often mentioned as a good deterrent. Ferret urine or scent is the best. Also mentioned is household ammonia. Ammonia is a common component of urine. Preparations incorporating castor oil are common in deterrents meant to be applied directly to vulnerable fruits or vegetables. Homemade versions of the commercially available castor oil based preparations are easily found online.

Barriers: Physical barriers can be effective, but these critters are resourceful. They can get through holes a narrow as ½ inch, and they can climb and burrow. It is recommended to use either solid or hardware cloth fences at least 18" high and buried at least 6" below the surface.

So what shall we do?

First of all, **there should absolutely be no use of rodenticides at the gardens**, so that option is out. Over the next few weeks, I'll be trying the gummy bear, bucket of death, ammonia and castor oil suggestions. If you try these methods on your own, please do not dispose of any dead rodents in the woods, trash/recycle barrels or elsewhere on the property. Dead rodents should be buried in your plot to decompose on their own or removed from the property. The Community Gardens Steering Committee's next meeting is July 17, 6-8 pm, at the gardens. This topic will be on the agenda. If you'd like to attend and give your input, please join us.

Madison Area Community Gardeners Email Listserv

Consider joining the Madison Area Community Gardeners listserv to connect with other community gardeners around the Madison area in order to share advice, questions, and successes. To join, visit <http://groups.google.com/group/madison-area-community-gardeners>.



Save the Date Good Food Garden Party September 8, 2012 at Troy Gardens 4:30 - 7:30

Featuring seasonal dishes from:

*The Coopers Tavern
L'Etoile and Graze
The Madison Club
Madison Sourdough
Marigold Kitchen
Tornado Steakhouse
Underground Food Collective
Vom Fass
Weary Traveler Freehouse*

With VERY locally sourced produce ...
from Troy Community Farm.

Tickets available 7/17 at:
www.brownpapertickets.com/events/256024

Good Food Garden Party is a zero-waste event



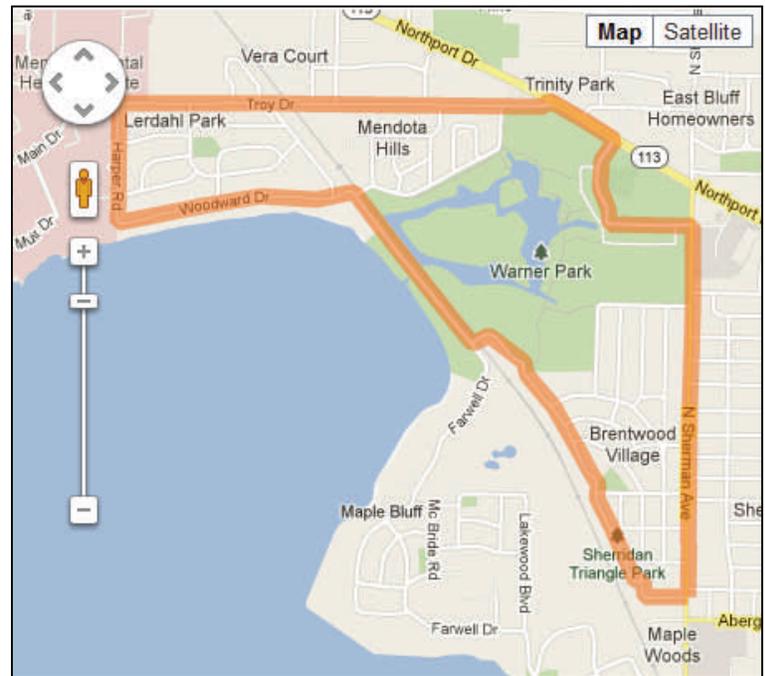
3601 Memorial Dr. Madison WI 53704 • 240-0409

Ride the Drive and Troy Gardens

Ride the Drive is coming to the north side and Troy Gardens will be an official festival site for the summer Ride the Drive Northside to be held **August 12 from 10 am - 3 pm**.

Ride the Drive is more than just five miles of roads closed to traffic (see map to the right). The event has a festival type atmosphere. There are activities, entertainment, music, and vendors in "villages" and on the route. Ride the Drive villages are stopping points along the route that include all kinds of family friendly activities, food, information booths, merchandise tents, art displays, and bouncy houses. Past activities have included: rock climbing walls, bike decorating, helmet fitting, live music, yoga demonstrations, bike rentals, obstacle courses, and parades. More information about the event can be found at the City of Madison's official website for the event <http://www.cityofmadison.com/parks/ridethedrive/northside/activities.cfm>.

If you are interested in helping with the event at Troy Gardens and earning volunteer time in the process, contact Martha Worcester in the Community GroundWorks office (martha@troygardens.org or 240-0409).



Troy Gardens to Participate in CAC Gardens Day

The Community Action Coalition (CAC) Gardens Program is organizing a **CAC Gardens Day** event on **September 29, 2012**, in conjunction with National Public Lands! This event will celebrate community gardens and the benefits they bring to the neighborhoods around them, with an eye to increasing public awareness of, support of, and involvement in gardens.

Troy Gardens will be one of the featured gardens for this event. Planning is in the early stages, but we are hoping to combine the features of our annual Savor the Summer festival with the apple pressing and potluck from our annual community gardens Harvest Festival. Apple pressing with the antique apple press using the Mendota Orchard's apples is always a hit with the kids and adults alike.

Watch for more information about the event in the August issue of *Digging In*. We need volunteers to help organize and staff this event. This is a great way to earn your volunteer time as gardeners. If you are interested in helping out, contact Martha Worcester in the Community GroundWorks office (martha@troygardens.org or 240-0409).



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Watering Wisely

After spending the middle part of June on a very rainy garden tour of southern England, I was shocked to see the desert-like conditions of southern Wisconsin on the bus ride from O'Hare to Madison. While away I was monitoring the weather in Madison but wasn't prepared to see dormant brown grass everywhere and crops in the fields struggling to survive the extremely hot temperatures. What did our plots at Troy look like?!

When I ventured out to Troy to see if anything had survived, I was pleasantly surprised to see lush green plants with lots of growth and apparently little damage from the fiery temperatures and lack of rain. Of course, I owe a great deal of thanks to my garden neighbors for watering in my absence, but I also owe a great deal of thanks to those volunteers who have worked in the past and work today to help maintain the water system at Troy. As I walked around the gardens, I couldn't help but notice how almost all the plants seemed to be thriving. They looked strong and were holding up well considering the recent weather. However, I also couldn't help wonder in the back of my mind how much the community gardens water bill would be this season. Past water bills for the gardens have been anywhere from \$800 to over \$1,000.

I don't want to discourage anyone from watering, but please water wisely. Water in the early morning or evening when there will be less evaporation, and water plants at ground level rather than from overhead. Most plants do better and have less disease vulnerability if they are watered at ground level without getting the leaves wet. Also, if you spray the water into the air, more of it evaporates. Mulching with hay or leaves will help retain moisture in the soil too.

- Jill Schneider

The Urban Gardener Part IV: The Fall Harvest and Garden

Tuesday, August 14, 2012

6 - 8 p.m.

Willy Street Coop East

Megan Cain and Claire Strader of Madison FarmWorks and Troy Community Farm will be teaching another Urban Gardener class, this one focusing on fall gardening topics such as harvesting and post-harvest handling and ideas for preserving the harvest including freezing, dehydrating, and root cellaring. They will talk about important tasks for putting the garden to bed for the winter such as cover crops and mulch, and vegetable crops that can be overwintered. They will also touch on overall garden planning in preparation for increasing your harvest for next year.

This class will be held at Willy Street Coop East. Please **register** through Willy Street by stopping by the Willy East Customer Service desk or by calling them at 251-6776. The cost is \$15 for Willy Street Coop members and \$25 for all others.

Geocaching at Troy Gardens

Geocaching is an outdoor treasure hunting game using GPS-enabled devices. Participants navigate to a specific set of GPS coordinates and then attempt to find the geocache (container) hidden at that location. Once the container is found, a small log book is signed as proof of the visit and the container is replaced into its hiding spot. The person who finds the container posts on the Geocaching website and shares details of their adventure. The containers vary in size and could be as small as a thimble, the size of a film canister, or perhaps a small Tupperware™ container. Geocaching is a “member-based” organization and the basic membership is free. Please see www.geocaching.com for more information about this sport.

With a project to increase community awareness of Madison area community gardens, Geocacher Lori Joas requested and received permission from Community GroundWorks to place a geocache container at Troy Community Gardens. And, because Troy Gardens is so much more than gardens, Lori placed a second geocache in another location on the land. We've already received some great feedback from one of the Geocachers, "I had no idea the community gardens were so large and obviously well organized/maintained. Thanks for bringing awareness to another one of Madison's treasures."

Thanks to Lori Joas for wanting to raise awareness of community gardens in the Madison area, and thanks to Patricia Lindquist, Natural Areas Coordinator for Community GroundWorks, for coordinating the placement of the geocaches at Troy.



Upcoming Events

Prairie Walks at Troy* (see details to the right)

Thurs., July 12, 19 & 26, 5:30-6:30 or 7:00 pm

Community Gardens Steering/Leadership Committee Meeting* (all gardeners welcome)

Tues., July 17, 6-8 pm, under tent at gardens

Community Gardens Work Day*

Sat., July 21, 9 am-12 noon

Ride the Drive @ Troy Gardens* (see Page 3)

Sat., Aug. 12, 10 am-3 pm

The Urban Gardener Part IV: The Fall Harvest and Garden (see above)

Tues., Aug. 14, 6-8 pm

Good Food Garden Party at Troy Gardens* (see Page 2)

Sat., Sept. 8, 4:30-7:30 pm

CAC Gardens Day at Troy Gardens* (see Page 3)

Sat., Sept. 29, Hours TBD

*For more info about these events, please call the Community GroundWorks office at 240-0409.

Prairie Walks at Troy

Prairie walk #1 (Thursday, July 12, 5:30-6:30 pm)

Join us for a summer stroll through the Troy Gardens prairie. We will see many of our beautiful prairie plants in full bloom and learn about why prairies are important to Wisconsin's history.

Prairie walk #2 (Thursday, July 19, 5:30-6:30 pm)

On this evening nature stroll, we will talk about ways that humans past and present have used Wisconsin's prairies. We'll learn about Native American uses of the land, prairie food sources, and more. The tour will include a visit to our edible landscape.

Prairie walk #3 (Thursday, July 26, 5:30-7 pm)

This summer nature walk will introduce visitors to the history of Troy Gardens' Natural Areas. We will learn about ways to enjoy and contribute to the Natural Areas, and the tour will culminate in a short volunteer work session in the prairie.

Prairie walks start at the prairie, straight up the hill past the community gardens and to the left of the tree line.



Photo by John Beck