

Moles Prefer To Feast On Grubs, Not Foliage

NEWARK, Del. — The much maligned mole does not really munch the roots or bulbs of plants, but it may damage them when tunneling through the soil in search of grubs and earthworms.

"If homeowners or farmers see mole tunnels and find plants disappearing, they should suspect field mice or voles," says Bob Hochmuth, University of Delaware extension agricultural agent. "These rodents will use mole tunnels for protection and as avenues to food supplies."

"Because moles eat insect pests -- including Japanese beetle larvae -- they can be beneficial," the agent explains. "A mole has a tremendous appetite and can consume nearly half its own weight in food daily."

The common mole, which is the most widespread species in the eastern United States, is a small, burrowing mammal about 5 to 8 inches long. It has grey fur; a long, tapering snout; no external ears; and tiny -- barely detectable -- eyes. Its most distinguishing feature is its broad, shovel-like, front feet.

Moles stay underground, seldom venturing out of their burrows. They are most active early in the morning and late in the evening. They plainly proclaim their

presence by the aboveground ridges caused by their burrowing.

"Most of the mole's burrowing is a random search for food, so many of the tunnels are seldom used again," Hochmuth says. "Their more permanent or 'active' tunnels usually run along fences, borders or other protected places."

Usually there is no need to control moles, the extension agent says. But if they become a nuisance, the two best control methods are trapping the moles and reducing insect populations.

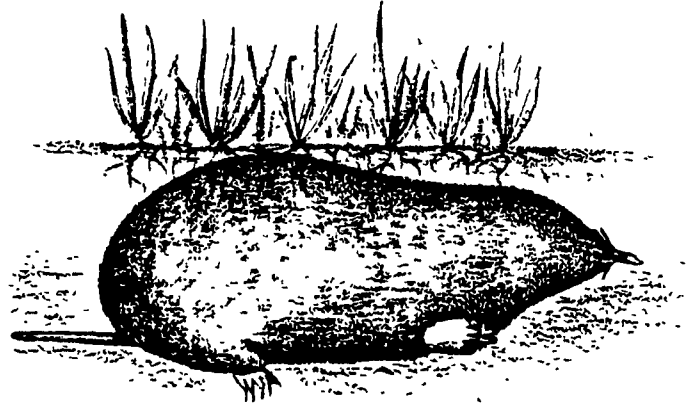
"In my opinion, you may win a few battles without traps," Hochmuth says. "However, the only way to win the 'war' is to trap them."

For trapping to succeed, a frequently used tunnel must be selected. "To locate an active tunnel, cave in short sections of several runways with your foot and indicate each site with a marker," says the agent. "Moles are very suspicious and will avoid areas that appear odd, so don't disturb the tunnels more than necessary."

Check each site the following day and note tunnels that have been rebuilt. A rebuilt tunnel is a prime place to put a trap.

Two types of traps, the harpoon and choker loop, are generally available. If there is no catch within a day or two, change locations, Hochmuth advises.

Moles can also be discouraged



by treating your yard with insecticides to reduce the insect population. This method requires time and patience, the extension agent warns.

Several materials are available for grub control including diazinon, Spectracide, trichlorfon, othanol and dursban. Water the treated areas thoroughly after an application of insecticide for grub control. For further details consult Delaware extension bulletin E-32, "Lawn Insects and Their Control." This is available at county offices in Newark (451-2506), Dover (697-4000) and Georgetown (856-7303).

An inexpensive aluminum barrier can also be used to fend off moles from small, isolated areas such as flower beds. "Any kind of bendable metal will work," says Hochmuth, "but a strip of sheet

aluminum about 18 inches wide would be best."

Bury the metal at least 12 inches deep and bend the remaining aboveground portion away from the flower bed at a 90-degree angle to the soil surface. For appearance's sake, the agent suggests covering the exposed aluminum lightly with a fine bark mulch or shredded mulch.

Repellents, such as mothballs, inserted in the tunnels will drive moles elsewhere. But again, this method is only practical in small areas. Hochmuth cautions against using lethal gas or poison baits.

"Gassing is generally ineffective since it's almost impossible to fill all tunnels with lethal amounts of poisonous gas," he says. "Poison baits are dangerous to children, pets and other animals and should not be used around a yard."

Controlling Water Controls Erosion

"Erosion and sediment are two environmental threats that we see, hear and read about everyday," says Conservation Technician Roy A. Shryock, U.S.D.A. Soil Conservation Service.

Our streams, rivers, and lakes are suffering from sediment and nutrient buildup. Much of this can be controlled by installing simple water control structures such as stripcropping, waterways, diversions, filters strips, and just plain grass fields. Waterways, diversions, and terraces safely lead runoff water to larger outlets and streams.

A temporary dam of number 4 stone or fabric filter across an outlet is necessary to filter soil sediment and trash until seeding is accomplished to maintain control. As the size of a watershed increases, larger and more complex structures are needed. Debris basins or sediment ponds are essential on most earthmoving construction sites. These are designed to impound run-off water, store it, and gradually release it to safe outlets or streams.

This system allows sediment to settle to the bottom and can then be removed to a suitable disposal site. On steeper slopes, stone center

waterways are necessary to control erosion. Stone is sized to withstand the force of water, thus eliminating erosion and sedimentation destruction. As slopes get steeper with drop-offs, concrete chutes are necessary to safely discharge water to channels or streams.

Many of these structures serve multiple purposes. A debris basin can serve as a sediment basin until areas are seeded. A permanent pool can be designed with flood-water storage allotted for fire protection and recreation. Another use for a water control structure is a fish hatchery and rearing raceway.

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