Mole Control…Is There Such A Thing?

How do I get rid of the mole that’s causing all those raised tunnels in my lawn? It’s a common question. And everyone seems to have tried, or at least heard of, some kind of a home remedy. Unfortunately, home remedies and many chemicals are not effective in controlling moles. Moles can quickly spread from lawn to lawn and the use of ineffective control measures may actually make the mole problem worse.

To understand mole control, it’s important to understand the animal. Moles are insectivores. They eat insects and soil invertebrates such as earthworms. They do not eat plants or plant roots. Some scientists actually consider the mole beneficial because they feed on things that can potentially harm your lawn like mole crickets, grubs, ants and slugs. Many homeowners however have a hard time appreciating the beneficial aspect of moles when their lawns are being tilled up.

The characteristic raised tunnels are actually created as the mole searches for food. They are capable of tunneling up to 18 feet in one hour. While this tunneling can be beneficial because it loosens and aerates the soil, it may cause some physical damage to your lawn’s root system by lifting the roots and allowing them to dry out. Usually the damage is minor and mostly cosmetic. So, if you can tolerate the tunnels, one option is to do nothing.

If you find the mole tunnels to be intolerable, then mole removal is recommended. Trapping is perhaps the most effective and practical method of mole control. Mole traps may be purchased at some garden centers. Be sure to follow printed instructions exactly. Traps should be set in active tunnels for maximum control. For more information on mole traps, review the UF/IFAS publication on Moles available online at http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/UW080.

Another control option is to reduce the mole’s food supply. The elimination of grubs, mole crickets and other soil insects will discourage the mole’s tunneling. Once the use of an appropriate insecticide has reduced insect numbers, the mole will become
discouraged and move to an area with a greater food source. Always be sure to follow the product’s label instructions. However, if your lawn is rich in organic matter and supports a large earthworm population (the mole’s favorite food), then insecticidal treatments will not necessarily discourage the mole’s tunneling.

So how do you know if the mole is eating soil insects or earthworms? It’s really very simple. Mix two ounces of a liquid soap in a gallon of water. Slowly pour the soapy water on the ground where there are new tunnels. Wait a few minutes. If earthworms are present, they will soon crawl out of the ground. In this case, insecticidal treatment will not be effective. However, if very few or no earthworms appear, then the chances are good that the mole is feeding on soil insects. In this case, insecticidal treatment may be effective. Contact your local County Horticulture Extension Agent for an insecticide recommendation.

So put away the chewing gum, the mothballs, the hot sauce, the garden hose and the vibrating devices. These methods are not effective in controlling moles.

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