Mole crickets can be serious pests of lawns and gardens in our area. But before you panic and begin treating your lawn for mole crickets, let’s learn more about this unique creature.

There are several species of mole crickets in our area. We have a native mole cricket, but it is rarely a pest. It’s the introduced, or exotic, species that cause all the trouble. At least three species of mole crickets were accidentally introduced to the southeastern United States in the early 1900’s, almost certainly hitchhiking in ship’s ballast. These exotics include the tawny, southern and shortwinged mole cricket.

How do you know if you have a mole cricket problem? Mole crickets feed on the foliage and roots of all southern grass species eventually causing a brown or dead spot in the lawn. Other common signs of a mole cricket infestation include narrow tunnels and small, raised mounds of soil. However, don’t assume that every mound or every dead spot indicates mole crickets. Many things can cause a dead spot and small mounds can be created by earthworms. The only sure-fire way of knowing you have a mole cricket problem is to flush them out.

The best way to monitor for mole crickets is the soap flush technique. In a sprinkling can, mix two tablespoons of lemon liquid dishwashing soap in two gallons of water. Apply this solution to a 2-foot by 2-foot area where you suspect mole crickets. It’s best to do this late in the day and after the lawn has been recently watered. Mole crickets are not evenly distributed throughout the turf, so repeat the soap flush in several areas of your lawn. If two to four mole crickets emerge within a few minutes, control measures are justified.

How do you get rid of mole crickets? Effective control depends on the season of the year and the life stage that the pests are in at the time. Timing of controls is as important as the choice of insecticide.

Late June or early July is considered to be the most ideal time to apply control measures. This timing is based on extensive research and knowledge of the
mole cricket life cycle. Mole crickets have one generation a year. In spring, the adults fly, mate and begin laying eggs. Most egg laying occurs between early May and mid-June.

It’s important to treat when the young mole crickets begin actively feeding in early summer. The longer you allow them to feed and grow the more difficult the task of managing them. Adults can be very difficult to control because of their ability to tunnel. Tunneling allows the adults to avoid contact with many conventional pesticides.

There are a number of products on the market to control mole crickets. Look for products that contain bifenthrin, cyfluthrin, deltamethrin, fipronil, imidacloprid or lambda-cyhalothrin. Some insecticides should be watered in after application to move them into the root zone of the grass. Be sure to read and follow all label directions.

Efforts at finding non-chemical, biological control measures have been underway in Florida since the 1970’s. There has been some success in using the parasitic nematode (*Steinernema scapterisci*) against mole crickets. Other imported natural enemies that are being studied include the red-eyed brazilian fly and a parasitic wasp. Hopefully in the future, these biological controls will be the answer to our mole cricket problems.

**Tip of the Week:** Don’t be concerned if your broadleaf evergreen plants like magnolias, evergreen azaleas, gardenias, hollies and camellias are loosing some of their leaves. Evergreen trees and shrubs shed leaves periodically and replace them with new ones. Typically, about 10 to 30 percent of the leaves will turn a bright yellow and fall every May or June.

Theresa Friday is the Residential Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names in this article is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others.