



We have all heard the saying, “Don’t make a mountain out of a molehill.” That can be difficult if we don’t even know what a molehill looks like. Knowing more about this pest can help you identify the damage and keep them from making molehills in your yard.

Moles are interesting critters. For starters, they ‘swim’ through the soil with their front feet and have very poor eyesight. They live in secluded, underground burrows and rarely come to the surface. There is not ‘off season’ for the mole because they do not hibernate and are active all season of the year. Moles live alone and create an extensive network of burrows and tunnels. Sometimes several can be trapped in the same location, but that doesn’t mean that they are all living in the same burrow. Networks of runways can be made independently and can occasionally join. One mole can feel as though there are several due to the amount of damage the runways cause.

The diet of the mole is also often misunderstood. If you look at the teeth of a mole, they look more like those of carnivorous, meat eating animals, than rodents. Often, the mole is blamed for damage to plant roots and tubers, but rodents are the real culprits. The mole’s diet consists mainly of worms, grubs, and insects it finds in the soil. Around here, a majority of the mole’s diet is actually earthworms, not grubs. If you have moles, it doesn’t necessarily mean you have grubs and need to be treated with an insecticide. Controlling the earthworms to limit the number of moles won’t work either, there is not a product on the market labeled for control of earthworms.

Moles are a blessing and a curse. The good news is that they remove many troublesome insects from lawns and gardens. The damage left behind by the moles feeding is the worst part. Their burrowing can damage lawns and parks, destroy flower beds, tear up grass roots, and create havoc in small garden plots. Properly identifying the pest is key to knowing if you are making the right move for controlling them. Moles will leave 2-24” volcano-shaped hills of dirt that are pushed up from deep in the tunnels, aka the molehill. The entrance to the tunnel will not be visible in the hill. The surface tunnels just under the turf are also a dead giveaway.

Controlling moles can turn out to be the tricky part. There aren’t any reliably effective repellants that can be sprinkled on the lawn or in the run for repelling moles. The frightening devices like the electronic, magnetic, or vibration producing devices are not effective either. Juicy Fruit gum, bottles buried in the ground, castor beans, flooding, or pinwheels are equally ineffective. Gas bombs or car exhaust are also not effective and can be dangerous if not done properly.

The good news is there are a few other methods that have been proven to be effective. Exclusion is one method. Hardware cloth buried at least 12 inches deep and bent out at 90 degrees can help keep moles out of small areas. Toxicants can be effective if you select the right one. Poison grains, peanuts, or pellets are ineffective because the mole doesn’t eat those foods. The baits that are shaped like earthworms will give you best results. When the mole finds this bait in the run, he thinks he has just found his favorite food and bites down, releasing the toxicant. Be sure to read and follow label instructions on any pesticides that are used.

Traps are another method to try. If used properly, they can give good results, but they can be the trickier method to perfect. The traps need to be placed in an active run. An active run is one that when stepped on, pops back up in a few days. Consider dry firing the trap prior to setting it for the mole, especially if you have soils with higher clay content. Dry firing will help to make sure the moving parts of the trap will move freely to capture the critter. Also consider covering the area where the trap is located to make sure there isn’t any sunlight penetrating into the run.

Don’t make a mountain out of a molehill, or better yet, don’t have a molehill in your yard at all. Showing a little patience and using the right control method will help to keep your lawn and garden intact and mole-free.

Elizabeth Exstrom is the Horticulture Extension Educator with Nebraska Extension in Hall County. For more information contact Elizabeth at elizabeth.exstrom@unl.edu, her blog at <http://huskerhort.com/>, or HuskerHort on Facebook and Twitter.