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Controlling Nuisance Moles

Moles. There are few pests that frustrate homeowners like moles do. For a pest seldom seen, their damage above ground more than makes up for their life underground!

The damage consists mostly of meandering paths of upheaved soil caused by their food foraging habits. Some tunnels are used longer than others, but once built, the damage is done! They make mowing difficult and despite the fact that moles don't feed on plant roots, the burrowing can damage plant roots and hurt grass stands. Their 'work' does do some good for reducing grub populations with stomach analyses showing that nearly two-thirds of moles studied had eaten white grubs (one had eaten 175 grubs)! Their burrowing helps with soil aeration and soil movement within the profile. Sadly, any good seldom offsets their damage!

What should a control program look like? Not sure if you've ever considered chewing gum, noisemakers, broken glass, bleach, windmills, or human hair in to a nuisance mole's run – but someone has! Try a home remedy if you want, but seldom are they effective or consistent. Poison baits are seldom effective because they are typically grain or vegetable matter based. Moles feed on earthworms and grubs, and simply won't consume it.

Products that eliminate their food source are possible. There are a number of products available for effective grub control, but very few – if any – on the market for earthworms. If an insect control program is initiated, just be prepared for a spike in foraging as the food source is eliminated, further compounding the damage.

Fumigants are typically restricted use pesticides, meaning most homeowners won't have access to them. They also tend to require specific placement in deep burrows, something that may be difficult for those other than certified pest control operators to identify.

The most successful and practical elimination method is trapping, with harpoon, choker, and scissor-jawed types available to homeowners. Each can be effective if set in the proper location – an area with evidence of fresh work in a burrow that runs in a straight line. Some tunnels will be used more than others, so use a broomstick to poke holes in multiple runs. Those that have been 'repaired' later in the day are active runs and can be used for trap placement. Remove a little soil, place the trap (with the triggering mechanism in the center of the run), and replace the soil, securing the trap so that the recoil will not lift it up out of the ground. Finish by pushing down two more holes – one on each side of the trap. Moles should be caught when they try to repair the tunnel. If you don't catch anything for three days – move the trap to a new run!

Mole 'control' is difficult, but population reduction is possible using the options above. For more information on mole control, check out Controlling Nuisance Moles available at your District Extension Office or online at: <http://www.ksre.ksu.edu/bookstore/pubs/c701.pdf>.