

Moles Are Getting Active, Again...

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

If I could have invented some way to easily repel moles, I could have retired at 40 a rich man. I haven't invented such a thing so I'm still working. No one has invented such a thing, regardless of any advertisement that you may have seen or home remedies that any one may have told you about. Moles haven't changed in the past couple thousand years and neither has the way that we have to deal with them.

There are a few things that are important to remember when dealing with moles. Moles are native to Kansas. They are found in both grasslands and forested areas. If you are next to a natural area, you will periodically deal with moles in your yard and garden for as long as you live. Moles are powerful digging machines. They swim through the soil with ease, especially soil in the spring that's been softened with April showers! Contrary to common opinion, moles do not eat roots, bulbs or seeds. They are insectivores. Over 99% of their diet is insects or other soil invertebrates.

They have two types of tunnels. Deeper tunnels are established that they use on a regular basis. These tunnels are excavated with soil pushed to the surface causing a little explosion of dirt on the surface. Do not confuse these with the piles of finely ground soil that pocket gophers push to the surface every few feet. Different critter with different issues! These deeper tunnels have small dens where moles may sleep and where females bear young.

The second type of tunnel is closer to the soil surface and are feeding tunnels. These are the ones that sink underfoot when you walk through an area that has a lot of mole activity. These are generally used just once and could be called a one trip buffet line. The mole swims through the soil and when their highly sensitive nose touches something that moves, like an insect or a worm, they bite it. This is why poisons are basically ineffective. All baits just sit in the tunnel and do nothing. If the mole were to eat it, it would die. But since the bait just sits there and does nothing, the mole doesn't associate it with food.

Because moles are powerful diggers, the use of fumigants doesn't seem to be very effective. The mole can plug a tunnel quickly before fumes can get to lethal levels. Some folks have had good success using a garden hose shoved into recent tunnel activity, and then "dispatching" the mole when it comes to the surface. Others have stuck hoses down tunnels and ran water for hours with no success.

Trapping may be the most effective way to try to control moles. However, trapping is a very painstaking and detailed effort that needs to be followed every day for possibly weeks on end. If you want to try trapping, stop by the Extension Office and pick up our bulletin that details the steps that you need to follow.

Some homeowners treat their lawns with insecticides in the hopes of eliminating all the food sources. This can work, in some cases, but if you do everything right and all of your neighbors do nothing, the moles will simply use your lawn as a highway to get from one food source to another!

Ultimately, the best thing to do is often nothing at all other than stomping down the tunnels every few days. The tunneling activity can create air pockets around plant roots causing the plants to die. Stomping down the tunnels eliminates these air pockets. Eventually the moles eat all the insects and will leave your yard for greener pastures elsewhere. Temporarily that is!