

Those Darn Moles Are Everywhere!

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

I was mowing my lawn earlier in the week and several times I felt that I was walking and pushing my mower in sand! My feet and the wheels of the mower kept getting sucked down as I mowed through areas that were being worked over heavily by moles. Judging by the number of questions I've been receiving in recent weeks, I'm not the only one currently blessed with moles.

The summer rains brought us lush growing conditions. It also brought good conditions for all sorts of soil living insects which then brings on lots of moles. The moist soils made easy digging and lots of food for the moles to go looking for. Before we can talk about control, we need to understand how moles "hunt". Moles literally swim through the soil. Their nose is very sensitive and if it touches anything that moves, it bites it and tries to eat it. They don't hunt by sight, sound or taste, merely by a touch on that sensitive little nose.

Every bait that we put down in the tunnel just sits there and doesn't move. Additionally, many of the mole tunnels that are close to the surface, the ones we sink in to most readily, are usually one trip buffet lines. They swim through the soil eating insects and they don't go back into those tunnels. Most baits end up being placed where the mole has been and is not likely coming back to.

Moles fear an open tunnel or changes in airflow in their tunnels. Being powerful diggers they can quickly close up a tunnel behind them if met with water or gas. Hence, unless you wind up getting the garden hose or gas device very close to where it is, it'll probably plug up the tunnel before it can be affected.

You can try to control the food source, grubs, earthworms and other soil insects, but in the long run, most of these are beneficial denizens of the soil. Since moles are native and will find refuge in prairie and wooded areas, if you live next to one of these areas, your lawn will always be at risk of being invaded by a mole. You can do everything right in your yard, but if the neighbors on either side don't, your yard can simply be a highway as the moles move back and forth from one lawn to the next.

Moles have to eat about half their weight every day to stay alive so they are going to be quite active. Normal populations are only about 3 to 5 per acre. If you find that certain tunnels keep getting opened back up after you stomp them down, consider using a trap. I personally prefer the claw or grabber trap over the harpoon trap. The claw traps are much less conspicuous and much easier to determine if you were successful in getting the mole! We do have a good bulletin on moles if you want to know more about trapping moles.

Moles do not eat the roots of plants or bulbs or underground plant parts. That's the modus operandi of gophers and voles which is another column of its own! However, the tunneling operation of moles will often leave air pockets around plant roots. This then causes the roots to dehydrate and die which is why stomping down mole runs is ver beneficial. You are eliminating the voids and getting the roots back into soil contact.

Ultimately, I often just stomp down the tunnels and let the mole clean out my lawn of soil insects. Eventually they will go on their way. They don't truly go into hibernation, but colder weather slows them down and forces them deeper. But in the meantime, feel free to drop by my house some evening and join me in the mole tunnel stomp dance!