

MOLE CONTROL

cooperative extension service/the university of georgia college of agricultural and environmental sciences/athens

The Common or Eastern Mole is the one most commonly found in our lawns, flower beds and fields. He can be identified by his long, pointed snout; inconspicuous eyes and ears; short tail; rounded front paws which turn outward; and stout claws. These features distinguish him from his smaller cousins, the shrews.

Moles live underground and seldom venture out of their burrows. When they do come out, it's generally at night. However, they are most active in the early morning and late evening hours. The ridges of earth "pushed" up by burrowing plainly indicate their presence.

The number of tunnels is no indication of the number of moles present. One mole may construct a maze of haphazard, crisscrossing runways. Certain runways are used frequently, but most of the tunneling is made in a random search for food, and some runways are seldom used again. It is important to remember this point when trying to trap the animals. The more permanent or "active" tunnels most often run along fences, plant rows, borders and other protected places and lead to feeding areas. While moles may be found in many different soil types, moist, shaded areas seem to be favored.

Moles feed almost exclusively on insects, earthworms, grubs and other insect larvae. For this reason, they are considered insectivores-not rodents. Damage to bulbs, flowers and vegetables, while often blamed on moles, usually is caused by mice using mole runways or by injury caused by moles while digging for food. Most plant damage blamed on moles should probably be charged to mice. These animals find the ready-made runways a source of food and cover.

Trapping

Trapping is one of the most satisfactory ways for eliminating moles. However, moles are very suspicious of any foreign objects in their runways. For instance, if any portion of a trap is exposed in the tunnel opening, moles will certainly detect it and will either desert that part of the runway or will tunnel around or under the trap. On the other hand, moles are not at all disturbed by soil blocking the runway, since they encounter this situation regularly when people or animals step on the burrow and close it. Taking advantage of this fact is one of the important secrets of successful mole trapping.

Two good traps for catching moles in Georgia are (1) the harpoon type, and (2) the choker type. These traps are available at most garden supply stores.

Success in mole trapping depends largely on the placement and setting of the trap. First, it is necessary to determine a suitable place for setting the trap. As stated earlier, many of the visible mole runways are made during the search **for food**, and may never be used again. Therefore, it is necessary to locate traps on runways that are used regularly. An easy way to locate such places is to flatten many sections of the runways. Do this by stepping on them. Mark the flattened places with stones or other small items. Repeat this procedure for a few days to discover places where the mole goes every day. These places will be raised. Set traps in these places.

HOW TO USE TRAPS

The Harpoon or Plunger Trap--Flatten a small section of the runway with your hand or foot (Fig. 1) to make a base for the trigger pan. Set the trap in place, with the trigger pan on the flattened runway. Raise and lower the prongs of the trap until they penetrate easily, making sure they cover the tunnel, then leave it set, ready for the first intruder (Fig. 2).



Figure 1.

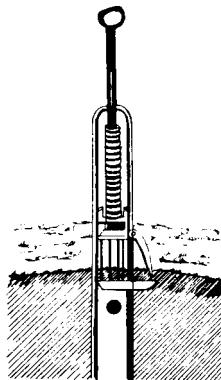


Figure 2.

The Choker Trap-Press down a small section of the runway firmly (Fig. 1 above) with your hand or foot to make a base for the trigger pan. Make slits in the ground (Fig. 3) for the loops. Set choker loops in the slits (Fig. 4) so that the loops encircle the runway. Be sure the bottoms of the loops (Fig. 5) are at least an inch below the original passage.

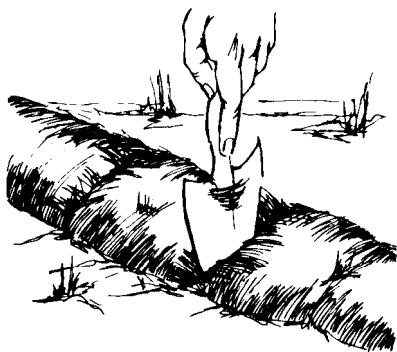


Figure 3.



Figure 4.

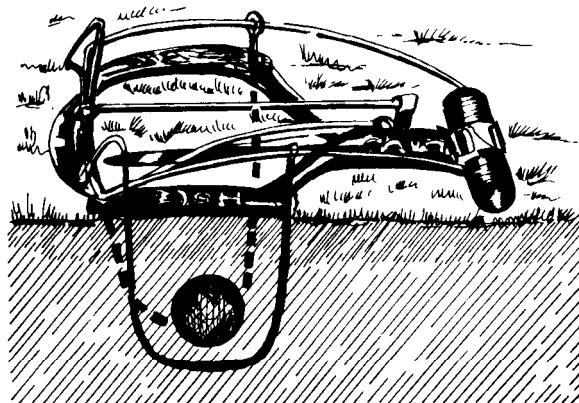


Figure 5.

If a trap fails to produce after two days of "reasonable" weather, it can mean (1) a change in habits of the mole, (2) the runway was disturbed too much or (3) the trap was improperly set and was detected by the mole. In any event, a trap at a non-productive set should be moved to a new location.

Fencing

Small areas, such as seed beds or "fish worm" beds, sometimes receive excessive and persistent mole damage. To protect these areas, it may be necessary to install an underground fence of concrete block, wood, sheetmetal, or hardware cloth. Such a fence should begin at the ground surface and go to a depth of at least 12 inches, then project outward at a 90-degree angle for an additional 10 inches. Connections and joints in the fence must be secure and snug, as food-hunting moles will travel along the fence searching for an entrance.

Soil Treatment to Eliminate the Food Supply

Moles eat earthworms, insects and other arthropods. Therefore use of suitable soil insecticides may eliminate their food supply and force them to move elsewhere. Immediate effects cannot be expected. Several months may elapse before all activity ceases and the moles go elsewhere in search of food. It may not be necessary to treat large blocks of ground if the moles are not living in the middle of the area. In such areas, a buffer zone of about 20 to 40 feet around the edge of the area will usually discourage further mole penetration.

If earthworms are abundant, this method may not work **since earthworms are resistant to some insecticides.**

Attention! Pesticide Precautions

1. Observe all directions, restrictions and precautions on pesticide labels. It is dangerous, wasteful and illegal to do otherwise.
2. Store all pesticides in original containers with labels intact and behind locked doors.
3. Use pesticides at correct dosage and interval to avoid illegal residues or injury to plants and animals.
4. Apply pesticides carefully to avoid drifts.
5. Bury surplus pesticides and destroy used containers so contamination of water and other hazards will not result.

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C. Wayne Jordan, Director

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