

ALABAMA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SYSTEM/ LIMESTONE COUNTY OFFICE

The Garden Spot
For week of October 19, 2009

Moles

Moles are small mammals that spend most of their lives in underground burrows. They are seldom seen by humans, but we know they are in our yards and gardens because of the series of tunnels they build. These tunnels form ridges in the soil as the mole searches for food. Moles (*Scalopus aquaticus*) are not rodents, but actually insect eaters related to shrews.

Southern moles are 6 to 7 inches long and weigh 3 to 4 ounces. They are well adapted for their tunneling lifestyle, with pointed noses that protrude about ½ inch beyond the mouth, small eyes and ear openings and large front feet. The feet are webbed and have sharp claws to aid in digging. Moles have enormous appetites and may eat up to 100 percent of their body weight in a single day. White grubs, earthworms, beetles, and assorted larvae are their principal foods.

Moles are usually solitary, although females and young may share the same burrow. The tunnels that run through yards and gardens may be used only once or may be traveled repeatedly. Moles may be active during any time of the day and seem to prefer cool, moist soil. Moles typically construct shallow surface tunnels in the spring, summer and fall; deep,

permanent tunnels for winter use. Nest cavities are located underground, connecting with the deep tunnels.

Contrary to popular belief, moles do not eat the roots and bulbs of flowers and vegetables. In fact, they may benefit these plants by feeding on grubs and worms that can damage them. The biggest challenge with moles is that they disfigure lawns and gardens. Since mole damage is usually isolated and of little economic consequence, localized control techniques are more practical than a major eradication program.

Controlling Moles

Repellents and poisons are generally ineffective in controlling moles. The problem with poisons is getting the moles to consume it. Since moles normally do not consume grain, seeds or nuts, poison baits are seldom effective. There are a few poisons registered for moles, but again, their effectiveness is not very good.

Applying chemicals to reduce or eliminate the moles' food sources may work, but will take several years. In the meantime, the moles' actual digging may increase as they search more diligently for other food sources.

Trapping is usually the most successful and practical method to get rid of moles and eliminate damage. There are several mole traps on the market. Each of these, when properly used, will give good results. Trapping typically takes advantage of a mole's natural habits.

There are lots of 'sure-fire' home remedies that have been tried for ages to control moles. Some include using broken bottles, chewing gum, razor blades, bleaches, and even a castor bean. Unfortunately, there are no 'short cuts' or magic wands when controlling moles.

For more information, you may visit the website: www.aces.edu/publications and download the Publication #ANR-759 "Mole Control". You may also stop by the Limestone County Extension Office at 1109 W. Market Street in Athens and pick up a copy of the publication.

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