

The Supreme Pests of Lawns – Moles!!!

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Although the weather changes from year to year and the look of your lawn may change with it, there are some things that seem to rear their ugly head each and every year. Along with the common weed sightings such as dandelion, ground ivy, and wild violet, moles always seem to be at the top of many homeowners and turf managers nuisance list. Anyone that has any experience maintaining turf whether it's a home lawn or golf course in Michigan has at one time or another battled the moles. Most recently I've noticed a mole tunneling under and through my crushed concrete driveway on its way from the woods to the pristine hunting grounds of my lawn. I only hope he or she may be discouraged when they find out that when compared to the relatively fertile and loose soil of the woods, the high clay content soil my turf is growing on is not so easy digging.



Before we begin with control options, here's a quick mole primer. There are two types of moles active in Michigan; eastern moles and star-nosed moles. The eastern mole is the mole that creates surface tunnels all over the place. The star-nosed mole is the mole that forms the big piles or volcanoes of soil on the surface. The star-nosed are probably considered the tougher of the two to control because their tunnels are much farther below ground.



First of all let's eliminate the one suburban legend that often comes forward when thinking of moles. Moles do not equal grubs and grubs do not equal moles. Just because you have moles doesn't mean you have grubs and eliminating grubs will not eliminate moles! Moles are insectivores; they eat insects, worms and other invertebrates. Notice they eat other delicacies besides just insects; grubs are just a portion of their diet. Now if you have grubs and they're slowly decimating your turf, you probably want to control them, but don't go applying insecticides simply thinking you'll get rid of the moles.

There are several products that are available to discourage moles.

- **Castor oil-based products** are widely available and some success stories have emerged from these products, but results can be inconsistent – get used to that saying.
- **Mothballs** or **mothflakes** placed in the tunnel – not effective or inconsistent.
- Planting a barrier of **plants that are toxic** such as castor beans, marigolds, or fritillaria – no research to support claims.
- **Vibration devices** omit some vibration into the ground to discourage moles – ineffective, one article claims daisy pinwheels might be effective assuming it's windy and you place one every 8 feet throughout the yard. (Hey honey I thought this would be a good look for the front lawn!)
- **Direct trapping** can be very effective but requires some stealth in identifying active tunnels and setting the traps properly – definitely the option for those with revenge on their mind. Please realize that by trapping we don't mean a catch and release program.
- **Poison baits** such as MolePatrol – actual research tends to support as being effective. The one poison bait that has received the most attention recently has been Talpirid, sold as Tomcat. Talpirid looks just like an earthworm, one of the moles favorite dishes, unfortunately it's now also available in a grub looking form reinforcing that suburban legend of grubs equals moles. Professionals and homeowners alike continue to report good results. For someone with three dogs and three cats roaming my lawn and from time to time feeling the spirit to start digging holes, poison baits just don't seem to be a realistic option for me.
- **Smoke cartridges** – reminds me of the gopher in Caddy Shack – not effective.
- **Poison peanuts** – from what I've read peanuts are not a normal part of a moles diet – therefore probably not effective.
- **Home remedies:** chewing gum, razor blades, glass, hair etc. – not effective and can be dangerous to you or your pets. Imagine that, razor blades or glass in the yard and the mole tunnel being dangerous.

After digging through my archives, it seems to have been about six years since I've really spent much time writing about moles. One thing that I do remember and still always get at my presentations when discussing moles is that the various home remedies do work and I either have bad information or whoever gave me that information must be doing it wrong. To all of you, I have said and will continue to say, if the juicy fruit works for you, fantastic and keep it up. For the rest of us, keep trapping and baiting and consider joining your local chapter of Moles Anonymous.