

Mole control

If you notice slightly raised tunnels meandering through your yard, chances are a mole has decided to visit.

Moles can be more active in irrigated lawns and landscapes during dry periods. A moist area is more attractive to a mole as compared to dryer natural areas.

The eastern mole is common in our area. It only takes a single mole to create a maze of rounded ridges across your landscape. The appetite of this tenacious tunneler motivates the extensive series of burrows. Despite the fact their tunneling can beneficially loosen and aerate the soil, it can also cause some minor physical damage to roots of grass, ornamentals and vegetables.

Moles are insectivores. They do not feed on roots. They use their sense of smell to sniff out earthworms and insects that live in the soil. Even though this furry mammal is only about 5 to 6 inches from the tip of its flexible nose to the end of its short tail, it can consume an amount of food equal to its body weight each day.

If you can tolerate them, control option 1 is to do nothing. Control option 2 is to use an insecticide to decrease the mole's food source. This only works if the mole's diet happens to be soil insects.

A soap flush can help determine the food source. Mix two ounces of liquid dish soap in a gallon-sized watering bucket. Pour this soapy water into the ground where there are fresh tunnels. Watch for the emergence of earthworms. If the soap flush produces few to no earthworms, chances are the mole is living off of insects. An insecticide treatment should help decrease the insect population and result in the mole going elsewhere for food. Always follow the label directions when using an insecticide.

If the soap flush results in the emergence of many earthworms, you can choose control option 3, which is a mole trap. Correct trap placement is critical for success.

First locate an active mole tunnel. To find a tunnel that is consistently traveled, collapse a section with your foot. Check the tunnel in a day or two. If it is raised back, it is an active tunnel. This is a good place to locate the trap. Follow the trap's instructions closely for best results. If trap fails to produce within 2 days, move it to a new location.

Poison bait and gas are not only dangerous but they are not effective in controlling moles. And the use of chewing gum, mothballs, flooding and vibration devices has not been shown to be effective in controlling moles in scientific tests.

Larry Williams, UF/IFAS Extension Agent, Okaloosa County, May 5, 2011