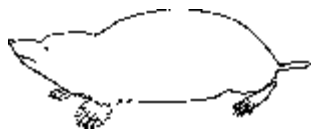


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A Report From the Mole Patrol

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Well it seems that 1997 is another splendid year for the mole species to fortify their position on the top shelf of dastardly lawn villains. Each year, crazed homeowners search for a cure for the vericose veins in their lawn caused by moles. I have become more sensitive to this situation in the last couple of years, as I have become more aware of the complexities of the problem and control strategies. In addition, I have been intrigued by the effect that mole damage can have on the lawn owner. At the risk of sounding insensitive, I am amazed and amused at what moles can impose on calm, thoughtful and well-adjusted people. As these cute little critters run around lawn areas looking for lunch, I have seen people change from jolly, upstanding citizens to a sort of mole-seeking Rambo action figures. It is the latter personality that has probably provided some of the crazy home-spun cures for moles like chewing gum, hair, seltzer tablets, etc.

In the last few years, a new control product was introduced call Mole Med. The active ingredient is castor oil, and it has been marginally effective. It has received mixed results. This year, the latest craze is a new product available in Michigan called "Mole Patrol."

The Ground Rules

Before we discuss Mole Patrol, let's cover a few mole basics. Dr. Glenn Dudderer, MSU's Wildlife Specialist, has been working on mole control for many years, and has provided excellent information. The two main mole species are the eastern mole (*Scalopus aquaticus*) and the star-nose mole (*Condylura cristata*). The eastern mole is the one whose tunnels are located near the surface. The star-nose mole has deeper tunnels that normally do not affect the surface, but the access holes leave mounds of soil on lawns.

A routine assumption from many people who have moles is that they must have grub problems, and they need to dose the lawn with an insecticide to knock out the moles.

Dr. Dudderer explains that moles feed on many items like worms and other soil insects. To try and deplete the soil of all foodstuffs is not an environmentally friendly approach. The castor oil product has had some effect, when applied properly. The material is not toxic to the moles, but it is rather offensive. Instead of rolling around in the castor oil, the moles may choose the neighbors yard to forage. The Mole Med needs to be watered into the soil to be most effective and has a limited life span, depending on water and heat patterns. Re-application might be necessary.

Mole Patrol

The rage is a product called Mole Patrol. It was also researched by Dr. Dudderer and Ms. Dale Elshoff in the 1980's. It is a bait product whose active ingredient is a blood thinner (chlorophacinone). The moles in the study were really attracted to the bait, unless they had an ample food supply.

Elshoff notes that in field trials, moles that had found a bird feeder where seed had fallen to the ground were noted as interested in the bait. That's right, they were eating bird seed. To properly use the bait, she suggests finding an active tunnel by stamping them down with your foot, and watching for those that are repaired. Then poke a hole in the top, and pour some bait inside. Be careful not to touch the bait, because you are a smelly person, according to the moles. It is also very important to cover the hole with a wad of paper or a soil plug, or the mole will sense the light penetration and will become wary.

The other important aspect is that moist soils will degrade the bait. Ever eat mushy raisin bran? Reapply often if these conditions exist. Since this is a bait product, be careful of non-target organisms like chipmunks or squirrels, and make sure the bait is only available to the moles.

Finally, trapping the little buggers still remains an effective standby. If you get enough of them, I'll bet they would make a great pair of slippers. Please pass along your favorite mole story, I just love 'em.



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