

# Mole-b-gone

**I was looking** through our athletic director's copy of *SPORTSTURF* and saw your address. I apologize for this not having anything to do with athletic fields, but I have a HUGE problem with moles wreaking havoc in my yard at home and haven't had any success in solving it! Do you know of any way to get rid of them?

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It was nice to hearing your athletic director reads this magazine and that it also caught your eye. Should I have expected anything less from an inquisitive science teacher? Mr. Brown was my high school science teacher in Seaford, DE, and he asked all of the right questions that led me to this plant-based profession.

I just happen to be darn good a catching these critters and so can anybody else that sets their mind to it. We followed a lot of bad advice at first and learned mostly by trial and error. Later we found this great website <http://www.themoleman.com> that put everything in perspective and helped us start thinking like a mole. Tom Schmidt did a great presentation at our state turf conference and you may want to have him at yours. So here's my mole story as it relates to your home lawn or any athletic field.

People generally feel violated when moles cause ruts, bumps, and mounds on their property and they will go to any length to get rid of this pest. Forget about all the gimmicks you might hear about, such as gum, poison peanuts, windmills or other lawn ornaments that vibrate, castor beans, drain cleaners, car exhaust, etc. Regardless of the claim they are not an effective means of getting rid of the mole problem you are experiencing.

Traps like the scissor or harpoon trap are the only effective way to get rid of problem moles. I prefer the scissor trap because it is a sturdier device and is seldom set off without catching the mole. The harpoon trap can sometimes miss the mole if the spears do not reach the tunneling mole.

The three important things to remember are use traps, be sure runs are active and being used daily, and be patient. Experiment with placing the harpoon or scissor trap in the mole run. Dig out a small section of the run to expose the actual mole tunnel. You should be able to see and feel the tunnel that is about two fingers wide. Notice the depth of the tunnel and realize that the harpoons or the scissors will need to be placed deep enough to impact the moles' run.

It takes practice to properly set both types of traps. Follow the directions



**CONGRATULATIONS TO DR. DAVE ON HIS ELECTION TO THE SPORTS TURF MANAGERS ASSOCIATION BOARD OF DIRECTORS. DAVE NOW REPRESENTS CATEGORY VIII MEMBERS, RESEARCH, TEACHING AND COOPERATIVE EXTENSION PERSONNEL.**

for setting the traps. With the harpoon trap work the spring mechanism up and down several times so that the harpoons make a clear channel to enter the ground when the mole sets off the trigger paddle. Otherwise the spears only go into the ground an inch and then force the trap out of the ground without catching the mole.

After arming either trap use a stick or long screw driver to trigger the trap and see if it would catch the mole. You'll get the hang of it after a while. Remember, catch the mole not your hand. A 5-gallon bucket loaded with a cinder block will keep small children out of the trap but others just want to know what's under the bucket. Use caution. I've caught more than 100 moles and only went to the emergency room once and that was before I learned to use a stick to practice setting off the traps.

Here are some other facts and words of encouragement in your quest against the mole:

Sites near wooded areas are more prone to moles because they thrive under the forest floor. Getting rid of grubs will not get rid of moles because they eat many other soil creatures, especially worms. Moles do not usually feed on plants. Moles are solitary except when mating so it is usually only one or two moles causing damage in an area with distinct runs. When the ground gets too hard and dry for moles to dig they go deeper where there is better food and moisture.

Set traps on a straight section of the run and avoid sharp curves or mounds of pure soil where they clean the tunnel.

Check your traps daily and plan on catch-

ing a mole on the same day that you set a trap in an active run. Traps set by 9 AM usually catch moles by 3 PM. I have watched very patient cats sit by a run and delicately extract moles while their brainless canine counterpart digs up the entire lawn for the same reward. If you are ever faced with a live mole do not pick it up with bare hands since they have sharp teeth and know how to use them. Over time you will begin to think like the mole and on occasion you will see one actually working the surface in a tunnel. It's a good time to vent your feelings and let any primitive instincts take over . . . they can be had by surface assault with a weapon of your choice.

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**QUESTIONS?** Send them to Dave Minner at Iowa State University, 106 Horticulture Hall, Ames, IA 50011, or email [dminner@iastate.edu](mailto:dminner@iastate.edu). Or, send them to Grady Miller at the University of Florida, PO Box 110670, Gainesville, FL 32611, or email [gmiller@mail.ifas.ufl.edu](mailto:gmiller@mail.ifas.ufl.edu).