

## Moles

Here in the Northwest, wherever soils are moist and rich enough to support plenty of earthworms, there will be moles. In fact, the presence of moles is an indication that you have good soil. Elimination of nature's rototillers is virtually impossible, yet we continue to devise creative ways to do so. This is understandable if you own a golf course or a large swath of manicured lawn. However, most of us don't.

There are numerous products and methods touted to kill or get rid moles. Some are amusing, but none are effective. The only way to rid yourself of moles is by trapping. Before we get into the details of mole management myths, it will be helpful to consider the physique and eating habits of our subject.

The mole's snout is long and slender and admirable suited to assimilating a diet that consists primarily of earthworms with an occasional side dish of grubs or other larvae. (Moles rarely, if ever, sample bulbs, root crops, and sprouting seeds. Plant damage blamed on moles is actually caused by voles.) The muscular forearms and large forefeet enable this critter to "swim" through the dirt at a remarkable pace. His habitat is a lengthy network of runways through which he continually roams in search of food. Keeping these facts in mind, let's look at the most common misconceptions of ways to fight moles.

### **Poison Fumes**

So-called mole bombs and car exhaust will probably cause your mole to burrow out of range at the first unsavory whiff. And, fumigating your soil with poison gas has a tendency to kill all the beneficial organisms that assist you with your gardening.

### **Mole Baits**

Remember that narrow mouth. If the bait doesn't have the smell and feel of a worm or soil-inhabiting insect, your mole will not find it appetizing. Poison baits may be effective in controlling gophers, and animal that is not a problem in the Puget Sound region. There is no substantiated evidence that commercial baits work to control moles.

### **Chewing Gum**

With such narrow mouth parts, a mole isn't capable of biting into a piece of gum, no matter how badly we'd like to "gum up" his insides.

### **Chocolate-Covered Laxatives**

Same as with gum. Moles do not eat these things!

### **Noxious Substances in the Run**

Occasionally, something as strong as mothballs or Drano placed in the tunnel will temporarily move your mole next door. But, wait a while and he'll be back. Environmentally, this is a very unsound practice. If you feel compelled to try this method, keep the stuff well away from your vegetable garden.

### **Sonic Repellers**

Laboratory tests have not proven these to be effective.

### **The Shotgun Approach**

It's illegal to discharge firearms in most residential areas. Besides, would you really want to take the chance of having shotgun pellets ricochet off stones?

### **The Water Treatment**

By the time you've flooded the runways with the garden hose, your mole will have moved to higher ground and built and furnished new quarters.

### **Vibrating Windmills**

Perhaps if you happen to place one directly over his nest, you might move him three feet to the right, but don't count on it.

### **Human Hair**

Not worth the effort.

**What does work? Dogs and Cats** A dog or a cat that's a good hunter can do an excellent job of keeping the mole population in check. No dog or cat?

**Trapping** is an effective way to handle your mole problem.

**However, it is illegal to use body-gripping traps on animals in Washington State.**

The exception to this is rats and mice. For detailed information on this go to <http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/living/trapping.htm>.

### **Underground Barriers**

Dig a ditch 24 to 30 inches deep and bury a fence of aluminum sheeting or 1/4-inch mesh galvanized hardware cloth. Bend the bottom 6 inches outward and allow 6 inches to extend above the ground surface. Before you do all this work, **make certain there are no moles inside the perimeter of the fence.**

### **Use Your Hands**

When moles are actively building mounds, flatten all the molehills and wait and watch for the mole to return to rebuild the mounds. When the mole begins pushing up soil, if you are quick, you can dig out the mole with a shovel. It is not illegal to kill moles captured on your property.

### **Living with Moles from a Gardener's Point of View**

Given the effort (building an underground barrier) or the time (watching and waiting for a mole to return to a mound) required, and the low odds of success, it makes sense to admit defeat in the ongoing battle against these burrowing critters. It makes even more sense not to begin the battle in the first place.

Moles are an important component of the ecosystem. They help create healthy soil. Their digging aerates and mixes soil layers, which improves drainage. They feed on earthworms (themselves an indicator of healthy soil), but they also eat insect larvae that can damage roots.

If you aren't ready to welcome moles to your landscape, tolerating them will work just as well.