Hardin County Extension News Release
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Controlling Moles is No Easy Task

Hardin County – Spring time has arrived and some property owners are noticing mounds and tunnels in their yards. This damage is most likely caused by moles, which are small chipmunk sized animals, six to eight inches in length, which weigh between three to six ounces. Although there are six different types of moles, the Eastern Mole is the most common in Ohio.

Depending on the health of the female, each year moles can produce one litter of two to six young after a gestation period of five to six weeks. Therefore, you can expect moles to be born from mid-May through April. However, usually less than 50% of a litter will survive long enough to reproduce. Because moles are insectivores, they feed on insects as their main source of food. They travel below the surface of the soil, causing unsightly tunnels and mounds in their search for food.

Not only can moles cause damage to lawns, their tunnels can cause root damage and provide cover and lanes of travel for other small mammals. One of the common insects moles feed on are grubs, however they prefer to eat earthworms. Just controlling grubs and other insects with insecticides may help, but will not be the end all method of controlling a mole problem. Moles will continue to dig new tunnels, searching for insects and earthworms in order to thrive.

Why are moles so hard to locate and control? Mole movement is controlled by climate and ground moisture. These small animals will move to an area where they can find food, which may be an adjacent lawn. They will follow the source of food throughout the year. If disturbed, moles may temporarily move to a new area, only to return to the original area later in the year. Because they are mobile, moles often confuse property owners into believing that they have solved the problem.
So what are ways to control moles? Habitat modification is one way of controlling moles. Be careful not to overwater your lawn. Moisture will cause insects and earthworms to come closer to the surface, attracting moles and their unsightly tunnels. Reduce the frequency and amount of watering when possible. Consider converting part of your lawn to gardens, hedgerows, and natural habitats where mole damage won’t be so evident. Numerous home remedies and scare tactics have been used by homeowners to try to deal with this problem. These methods have little value in controlling moles and may do harm to you or the environment. Some of these chemicals and methods are also illegal to use.

The most effective method of controlling moles is trapping them in the spring and fall, especially after a rain. Moles are in deeper soil during the summer and winter, making them difficult to locate and trap. Active tunnels are usually straight tunnels connecting two mounds. Main tunnels often are deeper and follow walkways, foundations, or other borders. Depress and mark the existing tunnels that you believe are actively being traveled. Check back within 24-48 hours to see if the tunnel has been re-opened. Make sure you follow all trap instructions before deploying the trap to ensure safe and humane use of the device.

Moles are interesting animals. One five-ounce mole can consume 45-50 pounds of insects per year. They can dig tunnels at the rate of 18 feet per hour and travel through existing tunnels at the rate of 80 feet per minute. Because moles contain about twice as much blood and hemoglobin as other mammals their size, they can breathe easier in underground environments with less oxygen. Moles can be very frustrating to deal with and cause considerable damage to a lawn. Managing this problem does not have an easy solution, and therefore effective mole control may require persistence combined with proven techniques to solve this problem.

For more information contact OSU Extension, Hardin County, visit the Hardin County OSU Extension web site at hardin.osu.edu, the Hardin County OSU Extension Facebook page, or call Mark Badertscher, Agriculture and Natural Resources Educator at 419-674-2297.