

Moles, www.ciscoe.com

Moles are one of the most humorous and aggravating pests in the garden: Humorous because of all the lame-brain methods that we dream up to get rid of them and aggravating because they drive you absolutely nuts until you catch them. Moles have long snouts and huge, flipper-type paws which enables them to swim through the soil.

What damage do they do?

Molehills can ruin the looks of a lawn, and the tunneling can undermine and sometimes kill valuable plants. Moles almost never eat plants, however voles (field mice) have been known to use the mole runs and they are voracious root eaters.

Mole Populations

It is rare to find more than five moles per acre. They hate each other's guts and the only time they rub noses is during mating season in February and March. (It's definitely not the boys rubbing noses!) The problem is that when you or your cat catches one, another soon senses that it's gone and takes its place. If you live in mole country, be ready for a long battle. Some farmers are known to catch well over 100 moles per year.

Repelling Moles (best method)

Make up some **Mint Mole Blaster** as follows: Begin by running a couple of big handfuls of mint stems and leaves through the blender with just enough water to make slurry. Then mix the blended concoction into a large soup pot full of water and simmer for about 30 minutes. This will make a concentrate that can be diluted to make about 6 gallons of mole blaster. Whenever you detect mole activity, pour the diluted mixture into mole holes and around the surrounding area. Irrigate lightly after application if the soil is dry. The key to success seems to be persistence. The moles evidently hate the smell of mint and if all goes well, the varmints will pack their bags and set up shop in your neighbors' gardens.

Repelling Moles (methods with possible merit)

A number of listeners to the show tried putting chopped up garlic down the mole holes. At first I got a lot of positive responses. However, in time, many listeners wrote to say the moles came back.

One person I met at a garden talk swears by putting 8 inch long mint stems down the mole holes. He says that all his neighbors have moles and he hasn't had them for over 10 years. Oh, la, la! Maybe he's got something there: Sounds similar to the Mint Mole Blaster above.

Some folks say they've had success with either putting hair in the mole holes, or spreading it all over the lawn. The hair evidently gets stuck between their toes and drives them crazy. I wanted to try that, but Mary wasn't too excited about me going to the barber

and then spreading a bunch of strangers' hair all over our yard. I heard it might be capable of driving your dogs and cats crazy, so use caution if you try the hair trick.

Finally, some listeners have had luck using castor oil. There is a product for sale, called 'Mole Med', with castor oil in it. The problem is that it was tested in Michigan and they have a different mole there which does not tunnel as deep in the ground as ours does. While some folks have had good success with this product, others have not. I suspect the difference may be the soil type, or the depth that the moles tunnel at in different conditions. Either way, 'Mole Med' is expensive and the effects generally only last a couple of months and it has to be reapplied. Local garden writer, Ann Lovejoy, swears by her mole recipe: Two parts castor oil, 1 part dish soap. Mix together until foamy. Add 2 tablespoons of mixture to 1 gallon of water. Spray in and around mole holes. Some people have told me that this doesn't work either. You'll have to decide.

Repelling Moles: Methods that Don't Work (even though some swear that they do)

There are at least as many home remedies to rid one's garden of moles as there are moles themselves.

Some methods have been proved not to work, like the following: Juicy Fruit gum put down the mole hole does not work. Evidently the mole is supposed to chew the gum, blow a giant bubble and suffocate! Moles only eat living insects and worms. They don't chew gum. For the same reason, baits also do not work. The sonic devices that make sounds to drive the moles away have been tested numerous times by scientists at WSU. Save your money: They don't work. Finally, I've talked to several folks who have tried growing the mole plant (*Euphorbia lathyris*) in their garden to repel the moles. This is a 5ft tall plant that dies after it goes to seed. The milky juice is caustic and can cause nasty burns to the skin and harm to the eyes. It spreads like wild and you'll regret planting it. I've heard it only works if you constantly cut the stems and put them down the mole holes. Finally, for those of you who don't like my favorite veggie, ... no, you can't kill moles by dumping brussels sprouts down the hole. Besides, what a waste of one of the best delicacies known to personkind!

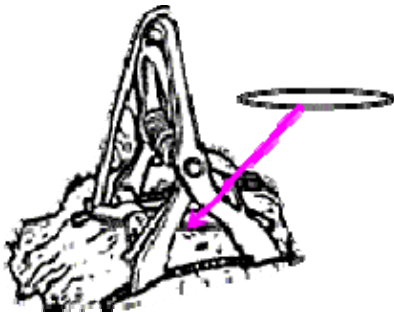
Trapping Moles

Note that the state of Washington bans certain types of traps such as snares that actually grip a part of the body. So be warned: You may be fined if you follow the trapping guidelines here which were written before the passage of the law. If you are in your backyard, you probably won't be caught.

In my opinion, the best and most dependable method to catch moles is the scissors trap. The key is to learn to do it properly. Here's how I do it: Go out the night before and stomp down the molehills. The hills you find the next morning will tell you where the mole is working and help you figure out where to set your trap. Moles make two kinds of runs. The feeder runs are just below the surface. These are the ones that sprain your ankle when you trip in them. The main runs are down about 4 to 12 inches deep. These are the

ones that the mole uses over and over again. Use a long screwdriver or similar device to push in the ground to find the tunnel. You'll feel the lack of resistance when the screwdriver hits the tunnel under ground. Begin looking by the hills. You need to find a straight section of tunnel so you can set up your trap. Here's a tip. Moles love straight edges. They tunnel along sidewalks, and they love edging materials, such as the cobblestones that I use to separate my gardens from the lawn. Plus worms accumulate in moist areas along edges, so the moles use these runs quite often. If there are some hills near these areas, look for the tunnel there.

Once you've found the straight run, dig out a section about the length and width of the trap. I usually use a trowel for this job. The tunnel should run straight through where you will put the trap. Dig the hole about 1/2in deeper than the tunnel. **Never handle the trap without the metal bars that are used to set it.** The trap should be placed so the scissors cover each end of the tunnel in the hole. The ends of the scissors will extend 1/2inch below the tunnel. You then build a mound of soil in the middle of the hole. The trigger will sit on top of the mound and be activated when the mole blasts through the mound of soil that the mole thinks is a cave in. Sprinkle soil around the edges where the tunnel meets the hole. Then cover the trap with a bucket and put a rock on it to keep dogs and other animals out. Those are the basics, but here are some important tips that can help. Check to see if the trigger is set right. The trap should fire if you drop it on the grass from 3' high. If it doesn't, slightly bend the metal rod that locks into the trigger mechanism to make the trigger fire easier. **(Remember to set and hold the trap with the special bars, never with ones hands!)**



Another trick is to place a tin can top (from a 29 ounce can) between the trigger and the mound of soil. This evidently increases the size and therefore sensitivity of the trigger. Some of the moles are too little to cause enough disturbances to make the trap fire. The addition of a tomato can lid solved that problem for me.

Another great tip came from a caller to the show. They recommended watering the area around the trap immediately after setting it. Evidently that gets the worms moving and attracts the mole. Quite often they are able to catch a mole within two hours after setting up the trap. By the way, many of the experts I've questioned tell me that it is not necessary to wear gloves when setting the trap to hide human odor. I don't use gloves (because it's easier to set the trap without them) and have been quite successful. It's always better to set up multiple traps than rely on only one. Most folks with serious mole problems set at least three and keep them going at all times.