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NEWS RELEASE FROM THE OFFICE OF:

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MOLE CONTROL

The mole is a small, insect-eating mammal. Contrary to a commonly held belief, it is not part of the rodent family. Moles are the most troublesome pest for many homeowners. Moles live almost entirely underground in a vast network of interconnecting tunnels. They frequently create shallow tunnels just below the surface where they capture worms, insects, and other invertebrates. They can eat some roots, bulbs, and other plant material, but generally the greatest problem caused by moles is their burrowing, which dislodges plants and dries out their roots. In lawn areas, the mounds and ridges resulting from their burrowing are unsightly and disfiguring.

Surface feeding burrows appear as ridges that the mole pushes up by forcing its way through the soil. Some of the surface runways are temporary. More permanent tunnels are deeper underground and are usually about 2 inches in diameter and 8 to 12 inches below the surface. Moles are active throughout the year, although surface activity slows or is absent during periods of extreme cold, heat, or drought.

Moles can cause significant problems in landscape or garden areas, especially in turf. Mole damage can be unsightly, making lawn maintenance difficult and destroying valuable plants. The number of moles that can be tolerated is usually quite low, sometimes even zero. As soon as you see an active mound or surface runway, initiate appropriate control actions.

Several methods of control are available, but no simple method has proven fail-proof, so it may be necessary to use a combination of techniques.

Trapping is the most universally applicable and dependable method of mole control. Several different kinds of mole traps are available at hardware stores, nurseries, or directly from the manufacturer. Keep in mind that the best mole traps differ from those for pocket gophers. Very few traps are effective for both animals.

Understanding mole behavior helps improve the way you set your traps. To be effective,

the trap must be set to catch the mole underground. When a mole's sensitive snout encounters a foreign object in the burrow, the mole is likely to plug off that portion and dig around or under the object. Therefore, traps should be set to straddle or encircle the tunnel, or be suspended above it.

Moles are undeterred by soil blocks in the tunnel, which occur naturally from cave-ins, and will continue digging through them rather than around them. The upward pressure of the mole's body or the movement of soil against a triggering plate springs the trap.

Moles are active throughout the year and can be trapped at any time. Before setting mole traps, determine which runways are currently in use. Moles dig a system of deep tunnels that are more or less permanently used as well as a network of surface runs used for feeding. Some of the surface tunnels are only temporary so they may not make a good trap set. Moles are more likely to be trapped in the deep runways, which they reuse almost permanently.

To determine where moles are active, tamp down short sections of surface runways. Observe these areas daily and retamp any raised sections, making note of the areas of activity. The selection of a frequently used runway is very important to the success of your control efforts. Set traps only in those runways used frequently by the mole.

Mole traps are fairly expensive, so most people tend to buy only one. Two major types of mole traps are most commonly used. These are the harpoon type and the choker loop type. Trap manufacturers often provide detailed instructions which should be followed carefully.

Because the mole's main diet consists of earthworms and insects, poisoning with baits is rarely effective.

People who have tried flooding moles out of an area or fumigating the tunnels with smoke/gas cartridges have had little success, but it may be worth trying if the effort is persistent. In theory, if moles are deprived of their food supply, they will move to other areas. Insecticide treatments to control soil insect pests may result in less food for moles. Such insect control programs must be done according to label instructions. However, this method is unlikely to effectively control moles.

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