

Mole mounds and burrow systems

- Cover pasture grasses and legumes, reducing production
- Make harvesting difficult by plugging or breaking harvesting equipment
- Contaminate hay and silage with dirt, which retards proper curing
- Make ideal seed-beds for undesirable grasses and weeds
- Damage and disfigure lawns and flowerbeds
- Expose shallow-rooted shrubs and plants to drying and to insect pests

A single litter is born in March or April, averaging three or four naked young. Young moles mature quickly and are fully furred, nearly adult size, and on their own in about a month. Average life span is about 3 years. Moles do not hibernate, but are active throughout the year. Surface activity slows during periods of extreme cold or drought.

Moles generally are beneficial because of the number of insects, insect larvae, and other invertebrate prey they eat. They also play

an ecological role by aerating the soil and mixing surface and subsurface soil layers.

Mole damage

Moies sometimes eat or damage tulips, lilies, iris, carrots, potatoes, peas, beans, corn, oats, wheat, and many other plants. Individual moles might feed heavily on such items. Up to 20 percent of the diet of Townsend's mole is plant material.

Some losses are caused by the mole's eating habits, but the primary damage results from burrowing and mound-building activities.

Moies rarely are seen unless captured in traps or killed while burrowing near the surface. But mounds of loose soil pushed to the surface indicate their presence. Moies continually excavate new tunnel systems or extend old ones. They dispose of the excess soil by digging a short lateral tunnel to the surface and shoving the soil out on top of the ground. The resulting mounds, though superficially resembling those of pocket gophers, usually are more rounded and symmetrical. The mounds are built up, volcano fashion, by repeated "eruptions" of soil pushed up through the center of the pile (Figure 1). Pocket gophers usually push soil out to one side, resulting in a flattened semicircle or fan-shaped mound, the plugged exit hole at one side of the pile (Figure 2). Thus, although similar, the workings of these two small earth movers are noticeably different, an important distinction in proper control of both pests.

The burrow system is a vast network of interconnecting tunnels and passages, varying in depth from 3 to

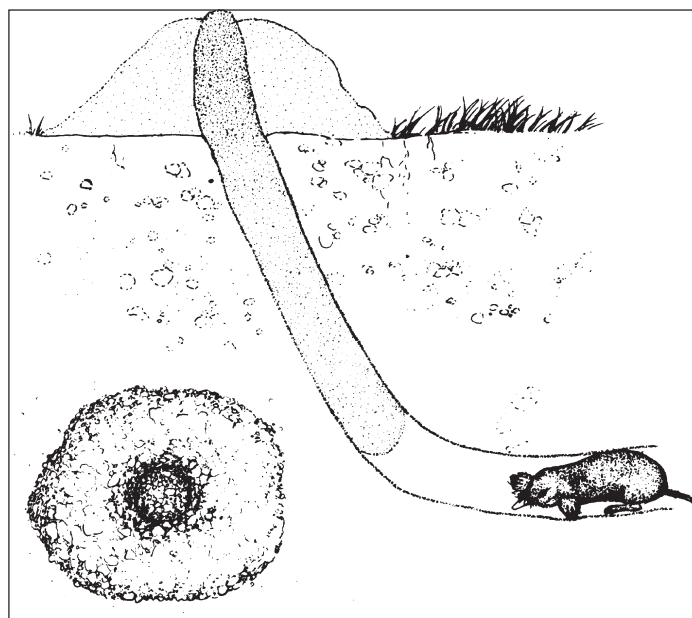


Figure 1.—Mole mounds tend to be circular with a plug in the middle. Compare with the pocket gopher mound in Figure 2.

30 inches or more. Moies are active throughout the year and make regular use of the tunnels from 6 to 10 inches deep. During periods of severe cold or extremely dry weather, earthworms become scarce in the upper soil layers, and moies move into the deeper tunnels in search of food. At such times, surface burrowing and mound-building activities are minimal, and control measures might be less effective.

The number of mounds or ridges in any given area does not indicate the number of moies present. A single Townsend's mole might construct from 50 to 100 mounds in a month. In coastal dairy pastures of Tillamook County, Oregon, densities vary from one mole in 6 acres to more than five per acre, but average only about two per acre. Some of these pastures appear to have been "plowed" by the moies, yet the mounds are caused not by hundreds of moies but by a few. Persistent and careful use of poisoned

baits and well-set traps usually controls them.

Urban dwellers are frustrated by this pesky little animal and dirt piles that pop up overnight in lawns, gardens, or flowerbeds. But usually only one or two moies are present, and they are eliminated easily.

Recommended controls

You can control moies effectively by the proper use of poisoned baits or traps or a combination of both methods. Use traps for moies in home gardens, lawns, or flowerbeds, as generally only a few moies are involved. For larger areas such as fields, pastures, and golf courses, properly placed toxic baits usually are more effective and less time consuming. Baiting might prove to be the simpler and quicker method, but traps probably will be necessary as a follow-up to eliminate animals that avoid the baits.

