

COASTAL GARDENER
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Q: Moles are making many burrows and ridges in my lawn and flower beds. How can I combat this pest?

A: A mole is a small mammal that lives almost its entire life underground. Moles are primarily carnivores, i.e., they eat insects, worms and other invertebrates. They will on occasion eat some roots, bulbs and other plant material, but plant tissues are not a preferred diet.

An adult mole will consume forty to fifty pounds of worms, insects and other meat per year. Adults weigh about five ounces, therefore, they consume approximately one third to a half of their body weight in food each day.

The female mole produces one litter of three to four young during the spring each year. Moles are active all year long, but their activity increases greatly in spring when the young need nursing.

Control of moles is not easy and will require persistence. Home remedies such as placing broken glass, razor blades, rose thorns, bleach, mothballs, lye, castor oil, hair, etc., have not proven to be effective. It should be noted here that moles are very active in their feeding activities. They will forage in an area for a time and then move to another area. After a time they may return or new moles may move in. Therefore, you may think you have controlled the mole problem with some device, but in reality the moles have moved on temporarily and will probably return.

Soil vibrators, electric shock devices, sound-producing devices, etc., also have no long-term effect. Trapping and toxic baits are presently the only known effective mole controls. If traps are used, they must be placed on/in burrows and runways that are currently in active use. Moles burrow to find food. Burrows are made and used for a few days and then abandoned. Therefore, placing traps has to be an ongoing process. Various traps have different modes of action, so read the directions and place the trap as instructed.

Recently, two new toxic baits have been developed. One is a gel which must be placed in an active burrow. The mole supposedly assumes the gel material is food and is poisoned.

The second bait is formulated in the shape of a worm. The artificial worm contains a feeding attractant and bromethalin which is lethal to the mole. For both baits read the package label directions and place the baits as instructed for best results.

Mole control is an ongoing process. Do not think that a one time trapping or baiting program is going to cure the problem. Whatever you choose as your control program, it will require periodic repeat applications.

Send your landscape and garden questions to: **The Coastal Gardener, 624-A West Foster Road, Santa Maria, CA 93455.**