

MOLES ARE NOT A SIGN OF GRUBS

By: Kelly Feehan, Extension Educator

Release: Week of April 27, 2020

Given recent questions asked it's time for a reminder that mole tunneling in a yard is not a sign of white grubs. And trying to control white grubs will not stop a mole from tunneling in a yard.

It's also a good time to remind people that insecticides do not need to be applied for grubs unless a lawn had a population of over eight grubs per square foot in August or September last year; or until eight grubs can be found per square foot in August of this year.

Insecticides need to be used responsibly to protect beneficial insects like pollinators and to reduce the likelihood of harmful insects developing insecticide resistance. Applying controls for white grubs on an annual basis without meeting the thresholds above is not responsible pesticide use.

On the mole and grub question, moles are most active in spring and fall, usually burrowing at dusk or near dawn and creating nuisance tunnels in lawns. In spring, mole activity is just as much for mating as for feeding on earthworms and insect.

Moles prefer soft, moist soil and often move into irrigated lawns from drier areas. Seventy percent of a moles diet is earthworms which insecticides do not control. As insectivores, moles will eat insects they encounter while tunneling; however grubs are not the reason moles invade lawns.

There are many mole remedies on the market, but few work well if at all. As insectivores, moles are not plant eaters so products such as poison peanuts will not control moles. Applying insecticides to reduce a moles food source will not control moles since insecticides are ineffective against earthworms.

Control methods Nebraska Extension recommends are trapping or the use of products containing Talpirid. It is important to follow label directions when using Talpirid, which is usually a bait placed in a gummy-like worm resembling earthworms. Note the poison bait is only placed on one end of the worm-like bait.

There are also tricks to effective trapping which can be a frustrating endeavor. For tips, such as where to best set traps, refer to our mole control NebGuide found at <https://go.unl.edu/macg>.

As for white grubs, these are the larvae of a scarab beetle called May or June beetles. White grubs overwinter as full grown larvae so they are found in lawns and gardens in spring. However, feeding at this time of year is limited and given their size, full grown grubs are difficult to control with insecticides.

Overwintering grubs soon pupate and emerge as adults in May and June. Mating and egg laying take place into July. Most eggs hatch by early August. It is this generation of root feeding grubs that damage a lawn if there are eight or more grubs per square foot. A vigorous growing lawn with a healthy root system will tolerate feeding by lower populations.

If a lawn had a population of over eight grubs per square foot in August or September last year, preventive products containing Imidacloprid (Merit) or halofenozide (Mach 2) provide effective grub control if applied from mid-June to early July this year.

When preventive products are not applied and grub control is needed in August or September of this year, meaning eight grubs per square feet, carbaryl (Sevin) or dylox provide the best control against white grubs after they hatch. Follow all label directions and water-in grub control products after application.

If you choose not to apply insecticides and some grub damage occurs, fall turf growth and overseeding thinned or bare areas in early September will easily repair damage in most lawns.