

Add-On Biz

BUSINESS

EXTEND YOUR BUSINESS

Mole control

► They may drive homeowners crazy, but moles can provide landscapers added income.

BY DON DALE

At times Keith Fisher feels that he's over-run by moles. His lawn care business, Growing Green Lawn Care, in Lawrenceville, IL, has seen a 40% increase in mole activity in the last five years, and his clients are clamoring for mole control, he estimates.

But that's good news, because he is making control a larger part of his business. That is a lot easier, nowadays, because instead of the traditional Victor traps, he is using Talpirid, a mole bait manufactured by Bell Laboratories. He has found that what was once an unpleasant sideline now can be an at-

tractive and time-efficient way to increase his revenue.

Fisher found success with the bait-impregnated "worms," which mimic earthworms, moles' traditional food. Unlike most aspects of his business, there are no startup costs other than the material. His four employees simply use a pencil or pen to punch a hole in the mole's active tunnels and drop a worm inside. Gloves are necessary for safety and to keep human scent off the worms.

Timing is everything

Fisher starts treatments in March, as moles begin tunneling near the surface, and it is easy to make an immediate ap-



Keith Fisher (right) and John Armstrong checking out mole runs

plication and do a follow-up if needed as the crew returns to mow the lawn. A crew notes the location of a worm insertion and returns in 10 days to see if it has been consumed.

The company has been using the bait since last summer, and has settled on a flat charge of \$10 per worm, including labor. It's a bargain for homeowners, because the previous cost for mole control was \$20 per trap. Fisher doesn't guarantee the application, however, and tells the client up-front that any follow-ups will cost more. He estimates a 60% success rate.

In Huntingburg, IN, Scott Souders increased his business by about 10% by using the product. He also charges by the worm, although another option is to sell a seasonal treatment program. Moles have become a significant part of Souders Lawn Care's chemical treatment business in the two years he has been using the product.

A simple solution

"It's not rocket science," Souders says of the use of Talpirid. But employees are cautioned to plug the mole hole and not crush the tunnel while working.

"You have to find your feeder tunnels," he notes, and then the grass is lifted with a putty knife so that a worm can be inserted. Mowing crews carry a few worms in their trucks for follow-ups during the season.

Souders now buys bait by the case, and he has used as many as 20 worms on mole-infested lawns. Like Fisher, he markets mostly by word of mouth, emphasizing client education about moles and the efficacy of the product. But he also now mentions mole control in his newspaper ads.

"The homeowner can't tell you were there, and that's a good thing," Souder says of a successful mole-busting visit.

— The author is a freelance writer living in Altadena, CA.

BY THE NUMBERS...



45-50

lbs. amount of worms and insects a 5-ounce mole consumes each year

FIVE

million — number of businesses that maintain turf in mole territory

EIGHTY feet per minute — speed at which a mole can travel through existing tunnels

50

million — number of home lawns in the U.S. and Canada located in mole territory

SOURCE: TALPIRID AND THEMOLEMAN.COM