

How to trap moles

by RON HALL / Senior Editor

Trapping controls moles the best, says Dr. Robert M. Corrigan, animal control specialist at Purdue University.

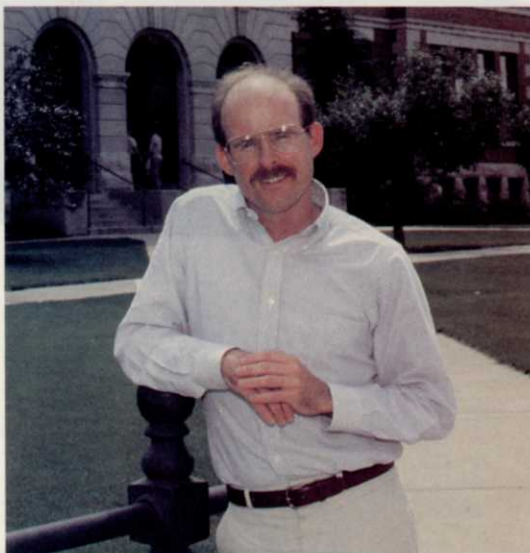
Follow the three "P's": patience, practice and persistence.

"Moles have an uncanny ability to detect and spring improperly set traps," says Corrigan. "So place traps carefully, and keep trying until experience leads to success."

For successful trapping, first locate the main runways. To identify main runways in a yard or on a golf course, look for runways which:

- ▶ follow more or less a straight course for some distance;
- ▶ appear to connect two mounds or two runway systems;
- ▶ follow fence rows, concrete paths or other manmade borders, or;
- ▶ follow a woody perimeter of a field or yard.

Surface runways are commonly seen as the raised ridges running through turf areas. They may be used daily, revisited at irregular intervals or only once and then abandoned. They connect with the deep runways which are located between 3 and



Purdue's Bobby Corrigan says moles aren't that hard to trap, but don't be surprised if another one moves in.

12 inches below the surface.

Also, because nests (4 to 16 inches below ground) are commonly located at protected spots along the edge of areas such as hedgerows or fence rows, border trapping at the places where runways enter the yard, field or garden often provides good results.

Corrigan recommends the harpoon trap (available from most hardware and garden shops), particularly for novices. Use three to five per acre. You can place plastic pails over the traps to prevent animals and children from tampering with them.

If a trap fails to produce a mole within four or five days, move it to another portion of the main runway system.

Corrigan says trapping is most effective during the spring and fall when mole activity rises. Also, trapping in the early spring can eliminate pregnant females.

In the East, moles mate during February and March with a single litter of three to five born later in the spring. Young moles grow rapidly and leave the nest by summer or fall.

Moles are insectivores. They feed primarily on earthworms, beetle grubs and other animals which live in the soil. They aren't rodents, so rodent baits do not control them.

Nor do they usually eat bulbs or the roots of garden plants. (Several species of mice also use runways and may be responsible for the occasional damage to roots and tubers in flower or vegetable gardens.)

Corrigan doesn't recommend using any baits, pesticides, gas cartridges or electronic noise makers to control moles. And he doesn't believe the claim that killing all the grubs in a lawn will cause moles to leave, since moles' main food is earthworms.

Trapping is the most efficient mole control, but they're not that difficult to capture live either, says Corrigan.

To capture a mole when it's observed tunneling, sneak up behind the mole and insert the blade of a shove or spade behind it so it cannot retreat back into the completed tunnel. Scoop it out of the ground with a shovel. The mole can be released into the woods where it's best suited anyway.

But even if you're successful in trapping or capturing all the moles on a property, your triumph might be short-lived. An opportunistic neighboring mole may just move into the suddenly vacated tunnels.

Corrigan says he knows of one $\frac{3}{4}$ -acre lawn, surrounded by woods, that yielded 68 moles over eight months.

"Probably the only solution there would be to put in a mole barrier," says Corrigan, a smooth barrier 16 to 18 inches into the soil and about eight inches above it surrounding the property.

Several species of moles can be found in the United States, but the most common one found in turfgrass in Midwest is the Eastern mole.

Corrigan spoke at the Ohio Turfgrass Conference this past December. □

