

Mole Crickets

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Mole crickets are tan-colored, cricket-like insects that feed on plant roots. They are about one inch long, with short, stout forelegs, spade-like feet and large eyes. Young are like adults but without wings and smaller and darker.

Mole crickets tunnel underground feeding on plant roots and leaving small tunnels. Attacked grass begins to wilt and die in spots. A way of telling if you have mole crickets is to try to pull up the dead and dying grass. If you have mole crickets the grass will often come up easily and will appear to have no roots. Mole crickets kill the roots due to feeding and tunneling. On bare ground you may also see the tunnels, especially a day or so after a rain.

Many people think they have mole crickets, but few do. Piles of dirt or holes in the lawn are generally not signs of mole cricket. The small raised mounds of granulated dirt we see in lawns are usually caused by earthworms – not mole crickets. On closely mowed athletic turf, mole crickets make mounds but in home lawns - look for raised tunnels. Even dying grass is not proof that you have mole crickets. Look for the small, finger-width tunnels and dying grass that has no roots. This will tell you that you have mole crickets. Contact your Extension agent if you need help identifying your problem.

Mole crickets feed at night and stay under ground in the day. An interesting way to flush them out so you can see them is to mix one ounce of lemon dishwashing detergent in a gallon of water. Drench the affected area with it and wait three to five minutes. This may make some mole crickets come to the surface. This works best on well-watered areas and during warm weather.

A few mole crickets are not a problem. If numbers increase to the point that they are killing your grass, there is a solution. It is best to know the stage of the mole cricket's development to control them best.

Mole crickets produce one generation a year. They usually lay their eggs from April through June. The eggs hatch in about three to four weeks. Late June or early July is the best time to treat for mole crickets. It is easier to kill them while they are small. Treat the affected area with an insecticide. Read and follow all label directions. Insecticides include bifenthrin, imidacloprid and cyfluthrin.

Mole crickets begin to reach adult stage in September and by November more than half of the population is adult. It is hard to kill them once they get big. Once again, they are best controlled in June and July.

If you must control mole crickets in late fall or spring, you should use baits for best results. Even then the insecticide will not kill them all. Baits are insecticides (carbaryl or Sevin) that are mixed with grain and an attractant. The mole crickets smell the bait, eat it and die. Look for mole cricket baits at garden centers or feed stores. The bag must say 'bait' on it and be labeled for killing mole crickets. Granules look like baits but do not perform the same way.

To use baits, let the lawn dry out. Water the lawn well and wait 24 hours. Apply freshly opened bait just before nightfall. Read and follow all label directions. You may see some dead crickets if you get up at daybreak the next morning.

Not all lawns need treatment. Actually, I seldom recommend mole cricket treatment. How will you know if you should treat in June? The most important factor is whether you have had them in the past. Have you positively identified them before? They may be back next year. If you have had them before, you may want to treat to prevent a reoccurrence.