

PEST CONTROL

Mole Crickets in your Lawn and Garden

How To Control Them



- Jonathan Ya'akobi

To use pesticides against mole crickets is the easy way out. In order to reduce their damage in the long term though, it's better not to rush in with the poisons.

An insect that causes considerable damage to garden plants and particularly to lawns is the mole cricket. (*Gryllotalpa gryllotalpa*) Unlike most insects that feed off plants, it is the adult of the species and not the caterpillar that is the main culprit. The mole cricket is unusually large, reaching some 5cm in length. It is also exceptionally fearsome in appearance. But it's your plants that need to worry not you or your family!

Controlling Mole Crickets

Mole crickets, as their common name implies, operate under the soils' surface, where they live and breed in channels that they have burrowed. They chew the plants' roots with their powerful jaws. The sight of upturned earth could well indicate their presence. Make sure first that the mound is not simply an ants' nest.

It is relatively easy to get rid of them chemically by use of pesticides that are either sprayed on the affected areas, or by the spreading of a gra-

nular poison. These often come in the form of a bait which is spread at the periphery of the garden. Despite the relative effectiveness of these pesticides, it is worthwhile not rushing in with the poisons, but to look for alternative methods instead.

The effects of pesticides can be summa-rized as follows:

*The pesticides, which in this case are organic phosphates, are liable to poison either directly or indirectly natural predators of the mole cricket, such as birds and other insects. Thus while the mole crickets may be removed temporarily, the populations of their natural enemies are also reduced. By disturbing the natural pest control that occurs between the mass of organisms in any given environment, the next generation of the pest operates in a habitat less hostile to itself. Consequently, the population levels of the mole cricket are liable to rise, causing greater damage to the garden plants.

There is however, an environment-friendly method of control, which while being a bit laborious, avoids the pitfalls associated with chemical means of pest eradication. It goes like this:

*Prepare a soapy solution in a bucket with a non-detergent, soap-like product. The solution should be low in concentration so as not to damage the lawn or neighboring plants.

*Pour the solution into the entrance to the mole crickets' burrow, and wait a few minutes. The insects should start coming up to the surface as they gasp for air. Collect the mole crickets and either remove them from the garden or kill them.

*It may be necessary to repeat the process a few times.

This method will not eradicate all the pests. Is that a bad thing?

Actually it is an excellent thing for some very good reasons:

*The existence of some pests provides food for their predators. Remember that the elimination of a pest insect species can only be temporary at best.

*Actually, the presence of mole crickets in small numbers is beneficial as they themselves prey on other insects, thereby contributing to an ecological balance in the garden.

*In principle, the aim of effective pest control is not the absolute elimination of pathogenic organisms. Instead it is the reduction of their population to levels whereby the damage they cause is minimal and insignificant.

