

Moles, Voles, and Holes

Written by Sandra Educate

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I suppose I should add armadillos, too. These are the creatures who make our lawns and gardens look like bombed-out battlefields. Especially if you have dogs who like to dig craters at their tunnels. I have four of those little guys that do and they like to sleep with me, too. No matter how often I brush or bathe them, I still have to vacuum my bed to remove the sand lest I have a nocturnal exfoliating treatment.

No wonder I live alone.

None of these garden marauders actually eat any of the plants in our gardens; they wreak havoc by burrowing for worms, grubs, insects and their larvae. Poison is out of the question. We need worms and such in our gardens. Not to mention that most poison is non-specific. It will kill any living creature, including your dogs.

So what can we do about them? If you're reading this column to find answers, you can stop reading. You won't find them here.

Short of chemicals, I've tried about everything to rid my yard of moles. I hired an expensive critter control company to come out weekly and set traps. The first week, they got three, and for the next seven weeks – nothing. So much for that. I cancelled further visits.

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Then I went on line to look for traps that I could set. One advertised, indeed almost guaranteed, success. It was a spring operated contraption with scissor-like blades that were plunged into the mole tunnel, and it would spring closed when a mole ran into it. Ugh! I felt like Madame Lafarge, but I needn't have. It never caught a single mole. It was expensive, too.

So I opted for some far less expensive doo-dads and had the same percentage of success. Zero.

I was told to try rolled-up unwrapped sticks of Juicy Fruit chewing gum. Moles can't do the Heimlich maneuver, so it was supposed to kill them by sticking in their gullet. Waste of chewing gum. Running a hose into a tunnel just produced a soggy area in the lawn. It was suggested that coffee grounds might repel moles, so I tried them around my Camellias. The Camellias looked great, and the moles were pleased, too.

I've even put down mothballs in the tunnels. It doesn't deter the moles, but the dogs seem to leave those sections alone. To keep on top of it, I would go broke buying mothballs for all the tunnels. I wouldn't mind the dogs digging so much if they captured a mole once in a while, but they're about as effective as the Madame Lafarge contraption.

I was truly appalled at some of remedies suggested on the internet. You'd have to have a heart of stone to utilize some of them and I'm certainly not going to repeat them here.

However, I admit that on a warm summer night, I looked outside and I was so frustrated and angry at the tunnels I saw in the moonlight (could it have been the wine?), I grabbed the largest knife I could find in my kitchen and went outside and began plunging the knife into the tunnels. When I realized what I was doing, I fell back on the lawn, convulsed with laughter at the thought that a neighbor might have seen this madwoman in her nightgown, in her yard at midnight with a butcher knife in her hand, obviously up to no good, and wondered whether or not to call 911.

Gardening can do strange things to you. Well, to me.

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If you've noticed that some of your plants and shrubs suddenly seem to keel over and die for no visible reason, it may be because those dratted critters have made tunnels around their roots, depriving them of soil, and therefore moisture and nourishment. During my clean-up strolls around the yard, (dogs, remember?) I make it a point to do the Cha-Cha around the base of plants to re-pack the soil around the roots. I wouldn't qualify for "Dancing With the Stars," but I've gotten pretty good at the Cha-Cha.

And so the bottom line seems to be that even if you're successful at removing the moles, using whatever remedy you can live with, it's still only temporary. Like poltergeists, Arnold Schwarzenegger and General MacArthur, they'll be back.

My problem would be solved if Dr. Scholl would tell me how he captures all those moles he uses to make moleskin patches.

Above: Lily and Scamp in the author's yard.