Recently, I have had several calls about how to control moles. Looking around the area at lawns, including my own, it’s easy to see the increased damage caused by moles this winter and spring. Moles are small mammals that spend most of their lives in underground burrows. They are similar in appearance and size to shrews and meadow mice, and may occupy the same habitat. They are seldom seen by humans, and only one species, the eastern mole, lives in Kansas. The most conspicuous features of the mole are the greatly enlarged paddle-like forefeet and prominent toenails, which enable the mole to literally swim through the soil. The legs are strong, the neck short, and the head elongated. Moles lack external ears and their eyes are so small that at first glance they appear to be missing.

Moles prefer loose, sandy loam soils and avoid heavy, dry, clay soils. Mole activity in lawns or fields usually shows up as ridges of upheaved soil created where runways were constructed as the animals moved about foraging for food. Some of these tunnels are used as travel lanes and may be abandoned immediately after being dug. Mounds of soil called molehills may be brought to the surface of the ground as moles dig deep, permanent tunnels and nest cavities.

Moles do like to feed on white grubs, so eradicating white grubs from your lawn could help keep moles out as they won’t have a good food source. Other methods such as repellents, toxicants, and fumigants are not advised because there is not much information to substantiate their control effectiveness.

While moles seem to possess a natural shrewdness and ability to sense danger, traps are the most practical and effective way to remove them. There are three excellent types of mole traps on the market. Each of these, if properly handled, will give good results. These traps each depend upon the same mechanism for releasing the spring. A broad trigger-pan triggers the trap as the mole upheaves the depressed portion of his surface burrow over which the trap is set. To set a trap properly, select a place in the surface runway where there is evidence of fresh work and where the burrow runs in a straight line. Dig out a portion of the burrow, locate the tunnel, and replace the soil, packing it firmly beneath where the trigger-pan of the trap will rest. If a trap fails to produce after two days, it can mean (1) the mole has changed its habits, (2) the runway was disturbed too much, or (3) the trap was improperly set and detected by the mole. In any event, move the trap to a new location. Informational videos on tracking active mole tunnels and how to properly set a trap can be found on our Facebook page “K-State Research and Extension – Dickinson County”.