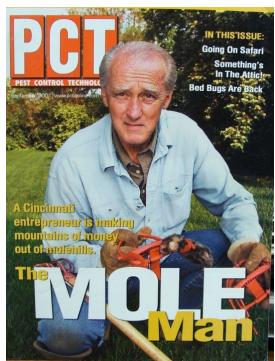


Do you have a mole problem? They're gorging on Brood X 17-year cicadas and making love.

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(Photo: Provided)

I don't mean to make a mountain into a molehill, but...

Mole activity has my front yard looking like a tiny war battleground. Tiny earthen dams have risen. Trails of dirt cut through the brown winter grass and leaves.

Let's be blunt: The yard is ugly. My limited, personal battle with moles has become futile. Before winter really set in, we raked leaves and smoothed over the little hills. They were back. The. Very. Next. Day.

Seeking help, I did what every red-blooded American would do: I turned to social media and took my dilemma to the people. Turns out, plenty of people share my pain.

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A friend who ought to do stand-up and lives in the Great Smoky Mountains told me Tennessee decided to build an underground fence to keep moles out. Did not. Another friend asked me if they were "Russian" moles. I think he's been watching too much MSNBC.

I was given a promising-sounding home remedy that involved using castor oil, cayenne pepper, dish soap. You are supposed to spray this concoction somewhere or another so that mole food won't taste so good. Wait a moment. That stuff could put your eye out.



Mole, often responsible for destroying gardens (Photo: jueraphoto, Getty Images/Stockphoto)

"Cayenne pepper can be dangerous," warns Mark Deacon, chair of the landscape horticulture department at Cincinnati State Technical and Community College. "Do your research, and don't believe everything you see on the Internet." Deacon offered a clue. It's about food availability for moles, typically white grubs and earthworms. Where there is food, moles will follow.

Other suggestions including getting a dog or a cat, and finally the use of a small-caliber firearm.

Then I found The Mole Man of Green Twp.

That would be Tom Schmidt, who has been trapping moles with enthusiasm since 1986. He's somewhat of a legend. He makes the earth move under mole's feet. They see him and go underground. People call Schmidt from all over the United States seeking advice on how to wage effective ground war against moles. Schmidt confirmed that we do, indeed, have more mole activity this year. More on that later.



Molehills in Cincinnati (Photo: Provided)

Schmidt had to perfect his craft. In 1986, he and his wife bought a pristine plot of land on the West Side. The land looked great in 1985. Soon, they had a mole infestation.

Desperate, he hooked up a hose to his V-8 Buick Skylark and ran it underground, seeking to commit mass mole murder by carbon monoxide. Didn't work. He did damage the clamps on the car and messed up the timing.

"It was amazing what we didn't know back then," he told me. Trapping, he came to discover, was the best and surest way for a homeowner to mitigate problems with moles. His website, themoleman.com, (<http://themoleman.com>) is unpretentious and chock full of resources. He calls "mole-ing" a war of attrition. His daughter, brothers and close friends have joined the family business.

"You either have to live with them or you fight them," he told me.

Schmidt confirms my suspicions about this uptick in mole activity down below. Turns out, they are chomping on Brood X (which emerge every 17 years) [cicadas](http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2004/05/0524_040524_cicadeterminator.html) (http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2004/05/0524_040524_cicadeterminator.html) down there. Cicadas are an added treat for moles, who usually subsist on earthworms. Brood X won't make it above ground until May 2021, but they are already fully grown, juicy and delicious. Cicadas dine on tree sap and burrow down. Scientists estimate there are a ton of cicadas per acre underground. Many of them plop down an elevator shaft of shorts into mole tunnel. And, well, dinner for moles.

So, healthier, well-fed Mama Moles are making lots of whoopee with Daddy Moles. And more of their babies, who have about a 50 percent mortality rate, live than die.

The result: More of our yards are looking like hell while the moles are partying like it's 2002.



College of Mount Saint Joseph
University Dean of Behavioral and
Natural Science Gene Kritsky,
Ph.D. captures a photograph of a
cicada at his Delhi Township
home. (Photo: Thanks to Gene
Kritsky)

Schmidt keeps a log detailing the number of moles he traps over time in the same location. Upticks in the number of moles trapped always correlate with the years when cicadas begin to reach maturity underground -- usually about two years before we see them.

Unless you have really deep pockets or just hate moles, Schmidt tells people to just let them be. Smooth over the hills and live in the yard you have. But if you really want them dead, you have to commit to long-term management of your mole problem. That means setting mechanical traps based on mole activity and behavior over time.

Thing is, moles don't actually live in our yards, Schmidt said. They are constantly on the move, living in the tunnels likely built by their grandfathers and mothers and cousins generations ago. They simply re-colonize. We only see evidence of about 5 percent of mole tunnels.

Now that I'm armed with enough knowledge to see how utterly powerless I am to wage war against moles. Not with cayenne pepper, or poison worms from my local home and garden retailer (moles don't have a great dental structure, so it's hard for them to chew artificial stuff). Not with battery-power sonar equipment or a cat or a dog.

Or a pistol.

I'm thinking of just living with the bald spots in my yard for a while.

Because, well, what's the freaking point? At least until the [cicadas \(\[http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2004/05/0524_040524_cicadeterminator.html\]\(http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2004/05/0524_040524_cicadeterminator.html\)\)](http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2004/05/0524_040524_cicadeterminator.html) rise and fly.

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