



The Eastern Mole is the most common mole in the U.S.

Moles are hidden garden treasures



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Natural Garden

Moles quite often are misunderstood. Most people's only experience with these mysterious creatures of the under-

ground is either walking on their meandering ridges that have popped up in the grass or with humble Mole from "The Wind in the Willows."

First, a bit of natural history to better understand the mole. The eastern mole, *Scalopus aquaticus*, is the most common mole in the U.S., living throughout Florida and the Southeast.

Adapted to a fossorial existence, they have tiny eyes, no external ears and large, paddle-shaped feet for digging. Their velvety soft fur stands straight up so that they can move forwards and backwards in their tunnels without trapping soil in their coats.

They prefer loose, well-drained soils, from sand to moist, rich loam. Moles make a deep level of tunnels where they live and nest, along with surface foraging tunnels, which make the characteristic ridges in your garden. Moles cre-

the soil in search of insects and earthworms.

Moles are part of the order Insectivora, along with shrews and hedgehogs. Contrary to common belief, moles are not eating your plant roots or plants. Actually they are eating the insects that are eating your plants and roots. Moles eat everything from mole crickets, beetle larvae, ants and ant brood, moth larvae and pupae (cutworms and armyworms), and slugs. While they are eating insect pests, they are also loosening and aerating the soil, which improves soil structure. Any damage they may do to plants by tunneling is minimal and usually cosmetic.

When people have a mole in their garden, their first instinct is to find a way to eradicate it. Instead of heading out with a spray or trap to rid your garden of quiet moles, welcome them as your new natural pest control and soil aerator. Although you might never see a living mole, know that they are just as friendly as Mole in "The Wind in the Willows" and are very beneficial mammals to have in the garden.

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