

The Juicy Fruit Solution - Isn't

This is yet another war story.

The Toro roars along on a bright summer afternoon. Suddenly, there is a softness, a tell-tale "give" underfoot. Behind, where the mower has passed, appears a line of dirt and grass roots. Ahead, it looks like the lawn has grown varicose veins, or speed bumps, or a miniature serpentine mound. Or, with more imagination, a rounded pattern of a maze from an English manor house. (That, certainly, would represent an upgrade for a half-acre lot on Berkshire Lane in Clifton). And, worst of all, a pile of Cincinnati clay mars the corner of an acceptable, if not perfect, Cincinnati greenward. The awful truth dawns.

YOU'VE GOT MOLES!

It is a well-established fact - witness crabgrass, nimbleweed, and various grubs - that Mother Nature abhors American lawns. A good lawn service can deal satisfactorily with most problems. But moles are an especial case.

During my thirty-five years on Berkshire Lane, I had already experienced several mole visitations. And had learned of - and tried some - many ways to cope with the infestations. First, and the only successful one, was used by a chemist friend of mine who lives on Grandin Road: he piped a combination of special gasses into the tunnels; the moles fled and have never returned. Unfortunately for Berkshire Lane, any use of phosgene anywhere has been prohibited. Otherwise I would be quite willing to re-fight World War I against the Hun under my sod.

I have tried traps, but only rarely did they spring, and each time the moles were too quick for them. I read about thumpers stuck in a mole run, placing a water hose in a run and drowning the beasts, and, even whistling bottles. But experienced mole victims have told me that none of these is effective.

"Will with a Way", a radio handy-man, broadcast a novel idea, and I tried it for two years running. Carefully pierce the top of a run, unwrap a stick of Juice Fruit Chewing gum, roll it up, drop it into the passage, and close it up again. All this was to be accomplished while wearing plastic gloves, so that no human scent would betray the bait. The object, of course, was to bind up the mole so that it died in costive agony. I think most persons plagued by moles revel in the prospect of mole agony. Eventually the beasts did go away, but, I suspect, not on account of Juicy Fruit, but because my property was out of feed. Yet, such is the power of radio, and so great is the desperation of lawn-owners, that the sale of Juicy Fruit skyrocketed and the price of Wrigley's stock rose sharply.

Are you reminded, as I have been, of the days when Ruth Lyons was queen of the Tri-State? When she advised that a piece of absorbent cotton attached to a screen door would drive away the flies? All over the 50-50 Club listening area little bits of cotton were sewn onto door screens. It was as if hundreds of Peter

Cottontails were trapped backwards in the wires. I never learned whether or not it was effective.

Well, back to my latest mole visitation. Carpooling from Clifton to Fourth Street one Monday evening, I happened to mention my problem. The ever-helpful Thomas Gephart responded: "Why don't you call the Moleman?" The Moleman? The Moleman?

Yes, Virginia, there IS a Moleman: Tom Schmidt, 2533 Orland Avenue, Cincinnati 45211 #662 3017.

I called to arrange a consultation, and agreed to combine it with a television interview he had negotiated. And so, with the cameras rolling and prompted by WCPO's Laura Randall, the Moleman delivered his spiel, and I had a chance to publicize the devastation the pests had committed on my property. Channel 9 broadcast the hit that evening. So, on account of my moles, I was given an equivalent of Andy Warhol's fifteen minutes of fame.

Moles know no property lines so, for \$650 each, my uphill neighbor and I joined in a compact with the Moleman.

I suppose very few, if any, of you have thought of what a moleman might look like. I hadn't. Still, although it would be a kind of retro fun, I would not expect a man in gray flannel Dr. Dentons scurrying through patently false underground caverns, as in the inimitable 1930s Saturday afternoon Flash Gordon serial. But what I encountered completely upstaged both Ms. Randall and me before the Channel 9 camera.

Cincinnati's moleman is straight out of a BBC Masterpiece Theatre program. True, he wore faded denims and soiled knee protectors. Otherwise attired, however, he might pass for a Regency man of fashion of the early nineteenth century. Or, serve as a model for a companion piece to the early twentieth century Sergeant portrait of Lord Ribblesdale. Tom Schmidt is

tall and slender; he holds himself easily erect; his face is clean-shaven; his cheekbones are high, his chin square, his English is impeccable. Any Jane Austen, or Mrs. Humphry Ward, for that matter, heroine would swoon at the sight of him.

Anyway, the Moleman is not just a local hero, is an acknowledged specialist in his field. He has published widely and is frequently asked to speak at conferences that feature "nuisance" wildlife.

I have never wanted to know much, if anything, about moles; I just wanted them gone. But in a budget about pests, it is incumbent on a reader to give some notion as to the nature of his subject. Fortunately, I have been able to consult a thirteen-page informational packet which comes with the services of the Moleman.

First, my moles are from the family TALPIDAE, which includes moles, desmans - for those of you who do not know a desman, it is an insectivorous aquatic mammal found in the south east of Russia - and shrew moles. Cincinnati moles are members of a sub-group TÁLPINAI and boast their own names: SCALÓPUS AQUÁTICUS. They are about the size of chipmunks and weigh between three and six ounces each. They have soft gray hair which is hinged so that they can move easily in any direction.

SCALÓPUS AQUÁTICUS are insectivorous, not rodents, and they eat grubs and ants, and they relish earthworms. One mole can devour between forty-five and fifty pounds of insects and worms each year. In Cincinnati the males are in rut beginning in the last week of February through the first week of April. Five to six weeks after mating the female produces a litter of two to six. They, after several weeks of nursing the teen-age moles take off to ruin my lawn.

Specialized muscles enable a mole to do its own thing. It can exert a lateral digging force of thirty-two times its own weight and can dig eighteen feet of

new tunnel in only one hour. It takes only one minute for it to race eighty feet through an existing tunnel. Moles don't hibernate; they just go deep when winter comes, waiting and planning cunning new ways to interfere with my lawn.

Two further comments. First, a hope dashed. Moles relish the young of the seventeen-year cicada. Will, I asked the Moleman, the gluttony of one pest destroy the nuisance of another? Alas, he responded, even ravenous SCALÓPUS AQUÁTICUS make little dent in the teeming cicada birth rate. Second, a legend confuted. What about the famous bridal chamber, where lubricious SCALÓPI AQUÁTICI carry on in a mole's version of a Las Vegas honeymoon suite: red velvet, heart-shaped bed, mirrored ceiling and all that? No. It seems that moles are loners; they don't like each other. They have it on and then separate. I don't want to picture that anyway, do you?

The Moleman's response to my problem has been to launch a war of attrition: Kill, Kill, Kill, the bastards! The weapon of choice is the Victor Out-of-Sight, or scissors, trap. It is placed in an established runway. The enemy, racing along at its eighty feet per minute speed, encounters it and is neatly cut in half. It should be a quick death, but I must confess that I would prefer that the hated beast suffer the slower agonizing death from constipation - if the Juicy Fruit solution had only worked. (There's nothing like a mole infestation to bring out the viciousness in a property owner.)

To alert the unwary each trap is then marked by a four-inch flag. At times of severe attack my lawn has flown as many as six of these banners. SIX FLAGS OVER BERKSHIRE! They are, incidentally the same red-orange color that Admiral Byrd pioneered for his markers on his first Antarctic expedition.

For the 1999 Christmas season a company called Toy Biz introduced a tempting new product: "What-a-Mole",

aimed at children ages four and up. I quote an article The Enquirer copied from the Orlando Sentinel:

The rules are primal: attack as many moles as you can before they can duck safely into their holes.

The arcade-size game board comes with nine talking moles with rather large choppers. Rather than pop up from a hole, the moles wear mining hats that contain lights that flash to signal a particular mole is due for a whacking.

These moles come with an attitude. When the light flashes on the designated mole, the rowdy rodent (sic.) issues taunts. Sound effects and wise-cracking phrases score the action.

One or two players can play at once, choosing from three distinctive games and five speed levels.

The game costs \$29.

How is the Moleman-Curry alliance faring in its campaign? We have been in combat for two years. The costs, at \$650 per year, are mounting, and I'm afraid the battles might continue for at least another year. The battlefield has some bare spots that have not yet healed, but enemy casualties have been, according to my ally at least, satisfactory. Even though the enemy can resort to the privileged sanctuary of my woods where the roots render the scissors inoperative.

During the first two years fifty moles were scissored. At \$650 a year my cost has been \$26 per beast. For the same \$650 I could buy 21.67 Whac-a-Mole games. Let's see: at 9 critters per board, times 26.7

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games, I could then act out, or Whac out, my  
frustrations on (9 x 26.7) 194.43 pretend moles.

Herbert F. Curry

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