



## **Pest Corner**

March, 2009

### **MOLES**

Indeed the mole is here to stay. Extermination is impractical. Trapping has been illegal in Washington State since Initiative 713 in 2000. Use of deterrents, including obnoxious substances like castor oil, Lysol and mothballs, only drive the animal temporarily elsewhere to find new hunting grounds.

Initial research on some newer poisonous baits designed to look and supposedly taste like earthworms, suggests that moles found them to be less than appetizing. In one experiment, live earthworms were "smeared" on the artificial bait worms to enhance their attractiveness and still the moles pushed them aside. In the end, the baited worms slowly dissolved away into the soil and the moles continued to inhabit the runs.

"Mole Plants" (*Euphorbia lathyris*), advertised as effective mole repellents, have not proven to be effective in scientific studies. These plants are prolific seed producers which can quickly invade an entire garden, if not kept in check, creating a new problem!

### **SCALE**

Scales do not resemble typical insect pests and may go unnoticed if they occur on the undersides of leaves. One may not be aware some plants are infested with scale insects until the black sooty mold fungus on plant foliage is visible. The sooty mold fungus grows on honeydew produced by scale insects as they feed. It is not unusual when large populations of scale develop to see plants appear as though they have been sprinkled with soot. There are more than 28 families of scales, with over 7,000 species, but not all scale insects are pests. Some are useful for lacquer and shellac, candle wax, and used for the biological control of noxious weeds. They produce a rich carmine color, used as a natural dye for cloth and in the food and beverage industry.

Most scale insects are female. Females are often noted for their hard shell-like "scale" which is a protection (brown bumps on the leaves and branches). They lay eggs under their scale covering, or in a cavity under their bodies; it is a protection from the winter cold. Tiny, six-legged crawlers emerge from

the eggs, move to newer growth on the plant, insert their mouthparts and begin to feed. A scale-like covering produced from waxy filaments then forms over each individual. Note that the "scale" covering protects this pest from predation by other insect and from insecticides.

Scale Control: Dormant (or delayed dormant) oils are effective in cutting off the insect's oxygen supply. Apply the oil when plants are not actively growing in the late winter or early Spring. Oils must be applied when temperatures are greater than 40 degrees F. to prevent separation of oil and water. Most effective timing is when crawlers are present.

Other options for control include spraying the plants with an insecticidal soap or the insecticide Orthene \*, used according to labeled directions. Thoroughly covering plant foliage including the undersides of leaves is important. It is not necessary to remove the sooty black mold fungus from the leaves since once the scale insects are controlled, honeydew production stops. Normal rainfall will eventually wash-off the sooty fungus from plant foliage.

### **PRUNING**

Shrubs that bloom early in the year, such as **forsythia**, form their flower buds the **previous** year. As soon as the last flowers fade in these early Spring bloomers, one can saw off one-fourth to one-third of the biggest, oldest stems at ground level. If one waits too long before pruning, new buds may form and pruning these new growth buds later in the season will deprive you from seeing new flowers **next** year. Use pruning shears to shorten all of the stems to two or three feet from the ground. If you wish to greatly limit the shrub's size, you can cut the branches as far back as six inches from the ground. By the end of the growing season, new branches will have formed. These will arch gracefully from the center and will be covered with new flower buds for next year's spring show. Same principles as above apply for other early-spring blooming shrubs.

\* Orthene brand name mentioned here **only** for educational purposes; not for commercial endorsement of a specific brand.

Adapted by Cecilia (O. Shores) from WSU-approved sources, and information published by Don Tapio, GH County Extension Agent.