Moles & Voles (Which is Which?)

By Susan Strine

The eastern mole is about 7" long with a tail 1-1/4" long.

The eye and ear canals are concealed by fur. The front feet are large and toes are webbed. Unlike voles, which are rodents, moles belong to a group of mammals known as insectivora. They eat insects almost exclusively. Moles like soil that is shaded and moist, explaining their preference for lawns and parks. Moles almost never come to the surface except by accident.

There are two species of voles in North Carolina: the pine vole and the meadow vole. They can be up to 5" long, looking very much like a mouse with a short tail. The largest part of a vole’s diet is vegetation. Voles quite often use abandoned mole tunnels resulting in moles being blamed for plant damage. They eat roots and shoots and can girdle the trunks of plants at ground level. Since the vole likes cover while above ground, it is important to not have a heavy mulch layer close to the stems and trunks of plants you want to protect.

The voles have many predators as, unlike moles, they often feed above ground.

Pest control is completely different for moles and voles.

For more information about these animals and how to control them, call the Master Gardener Hotline or go to the North Carolina Cooperative Extension website at: ces.ncsu.edu

Local Activities of Interest

Southern Pines Home & Garden Tour

When: Wednesday, April 11, 10am-5pm
See southernpinesgardenclub.com for more information.

Sandhills Horticultural Society & Landscape Gardening Student Plant Sale

Where: Ball Garden Visitors Center at SCC
When: Saturday, April 21, 8am-12pm
Pre-order or buy day of sale. Call Tricia Mabe at 695-3882 for a plant list, or to order.

Weymouth Plant & Garden Tag Sale

Where: Weymouth Center
When: Saturday, April 14, 9am-12pm
Event sponsored by the Dirt Gardeners of Weymouth.

Southern Pines Springfest

Where: Downtown Southern Pines.
When: Saturday, April 28, 10am-4pm
More than 160 vendors of arts, crafts, games, rides, food and entertainment. Includes Tour de Moore, the annual bicycle race.
Recipe of the Month
By Kathy Peterson, RD, LDN

Collards, turnips, beets, kale and spinach...spring is the
time of greens! Dark-green leafy vegetables are full of
vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, and fiber. Whether you
grow your own or purchase them at your farmers
market or local grocer, it is hard to overlook an emerging
trend of preparing leafy greens in such versatile ways.

Baked Kale Chips
4 large handfuls fresh kale
Olive oil cooking spray
1/4 tsp crushed sea salt
½ tsp cracked pepper

Preheat oven to 275° F. Line baking sheet with foil and
lightly cover with cooking spray. Rinse the kale leaves un-
der running water. Use a salad spinner to remove excess
water. Remove center rib from each kale leaf with a sharp
paring knife. Discard all center ribs into your compost bin!
Place kale leaves on the prepared baking sheet in a single
layer. Lightly coat leaves with cooking spray, crushed sea
salt and cracked pepper. Bake for 20-30 minutes or until
leaves are crisp. Turn kale leaves over with spatula every
10 minutes to provide even baking.

Nutrition: 1 cup raw kale = 34 calories, 0.5 gm fat, 29 mg
sodium, 6 gm carbohydrates, 1.3 gm fiber, 90 mg calcium,
299 mg potassium.

What’s Bugging You?
By Sandy McShea

You might find this big cater-
pillar (2–2 1/2 inches long)
on your nut, fruit and shade
tree leaves. In the southeast,
lunas seem to prefer members
of the walnut family, hickory,
sumac, sweetgum, and persim-
mon trees. But don’t be too
fast to condemn these little
guys if you see them munching on your trees. They are the
larva stage of the beautiful and illusive luna moth.

Luna moths, like other members of the order lepidoptera,
pass through four stages of development during their life-
time: egg, larva, pupa and adult. The caterpillar is the larva
stage.

The adult female luna moths emit a pheromone to attract
mates from as far as five miles away. The females then lay
their eggs on a host plant. After about 10-12 days, the luna
moth eggs hatch into tiny caterpillars. These larvae eat con-
stantly for up to three weeks before weaving a cocoon.
When the pupae in the cocoons mature and emerge as
adults, they climb up a nearby tree to expand and harden
their wings. That can take up to two hours. The wing span
of a mature luna moth can be up to five inches!

Adult luna moths have no mouths and do not eat. They live
for only a few days to one week at most, so it is unusual to
see one. They live only to reproduce, and the number of
broods is dependent on the location and climate. In
warmer climates in the south, they may produce as many
as three broods, whereas in colder climates they will have
only one.

Nature has provided the luna moth with an ingenious
protective disguise: its wings are designed to look like eyes, thereby fooling
their predators.

In addition it is said that the luna is attracted by the light
of the moon and becomes disoriented by artificial light.
Maybe we should all think twice before leaving that
porch light on all night.

A computer search for “luna moth” or
“lepidoptera” can provide more information
about these fascinating creatures.
Bee Smart!
By Sandy McShea

The native eastern species of orchard mason bee is a gentle bee that pollinates trees, flowers and vegetables. You can encourage mason bees in your garden by providing them with a nesting spot.

When finished, the block should be hung in a secure manner so that it does not sway in the wind. Be sure the nest is at least three feet above ground. And, it would be good to provide a mud supply for the bees to use to construct cell partitions. (Now you know why they are called “mason bees.”) This mud source can be a trench or tub located nearby where muddy soil can be maintained during the nesting period. The mud should not be highly organic or sandy. Clay soils work well.

Both males and females will nest in holes drilled in a smooth wooden block, and untreated 4-x-6 lumber works great.

To make a mason bee nest, drill 5/16” diameter holes, 3/4” on center, to a depth of 4-8 inches. Do not drill completely through the lumber. The diameter of the hole is important in that smaller holes will encourage production of too many male bees. Once holes have been drilled, attach a roof to provide protection from the midday sun and rain. An additional small hole can be drilled in the back or roof to provide a means for hanging the block.

The finished nest can then be painted or stained if desired, but do not use a wood preservative.

Soil Amendment Recipe
By Susan Strine

Here’s a handy recipe for some great homemade soil amendment for your garden. The only equipment you need is a shovel, a 12 oz. coffee can, and a large wheelbarrow in which to mix the following ingredients:

- 8 shovels each of compost, potting soil and peat moss
- 5 shovels fine pine bark
- 2 coffee cans of wood ash
- 4 coffee cans each of bonemeal, cottonseed meal, blood-meal, and chicken or hog manure

All of the above, save the coffee can, can be found at full-service garden and feed centers.
Add soil amendment to new flower planting beds. This will help plants become established and bloom better.

Have your soil tested before you fertilize. The tests are free and soil test boxes can be picked up at the Extension Office in Carthage or at local events when Moore County Master Gardeners are present.

Most pruning should be finished by now. Wait to prune woody perennials until new growth emerges. That will help you decide where to cut. Spring flowering trees and shrubs should not be pruned until after they bloom.

Be careful when weeding so that you do not pull the seedlings of last year’s annuals.

Put two to three inches of pinestraw or pinebark mulch on the soil around trees and shrubs. Keep the mulch several inches away from stems and trunks. When mulching flower beds, be careful not to cover emerging seedlings.

The average frost free date for our area is April 15. Wait until then to plant bedding plants, tomatoes and peppers.

When choosing annual flowers to plant, look for plants with lots of buds which are not yet in bloom. These plants will actually get a better start in your garden, will bloom sooner, and will grow faster and heartier.

Don’t miss our next edition in May 2012.

For additional copies of this and past issues of this newsletter, go to ces.ncsu.edu and search for “Dig This”

Any questions, call the Master Gardener Volunteer Information Hotline 910-947-3188

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