

Hills and holes: Not part of your landscaping design?

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**By L. J. Bruton**

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Do pests 'gopher' your lawn? Chances are, if you have a lawn, you risk the chance of having pests, such as the gopher and his cousin the mole. And, perhaps even those pesky six-legged creatures—ants and other insects—call your grass patches home. Why are these animals and insects attracted to your lawn? And, what can you do to stop them from burrowing and nesting? Those answers and more will follow in this article.

Most household lawns are not large enough to attract so many pests that a serious problem will result, but nonetheless, they can be a nuisance and cause some minor damage to your grassy nook. Insects are not very easy to spot, as some are so small they are naked to the eye, however, they can be identified by dead, brown patches of grass. Telltale signs of moles and gophers are a little more obvious—dirt hills on the top of your lawn, and beneath them, tunnels and holes. Once you identify that you have pests, you then need to decide the best way for you to take care of the problem.

The first option is to call an expert. Use your local directory or a referral from someone you know that had a similar problem. But if you are like most people today, you may want to do it yourself. And, if you are a DIYer, the first thing you need to do is size up your situation, and what you are up against. Let's look at insects first.

When dealing with insects, the first thing you must realize is that not all insects are bad guys. Sure, we probably would swat at them all, but in reality, some insects can actually act as exterminators against others. Other insects can actually help control your thatch level. There are two types of insects when it comes to the ones who invade your lawn: above and below ground insects. Above ground insects usually feed on your grass, and can be seen fairly easy. Some examples of these can be chinch bugs, green bugs and armyworms.

The below ground insects are just that, they feed on your lawn through the root system, which means they are the most destructive of the two. They are also the most difficult to identify since they are not easily seen. These can include grubs, beetle larvae and billbugs. There are literally thousands of species of insects, far too many to list here. You could borrow a book on insects from your local library,

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or check out some entomology websites to learn more about what roles and functions they have. After all, you don't want to kill off any allies!

There are five basic types of treatment for anthills and other insects: chemical insecticides, biological insecticides, botanical insecticides, insecticide soaps and predatory insects (remember– some are your friend!). There may also be specific types for specific insects. Weigh each option and choose which one fits your needs the best.

Moles and gophers are two of the most common animal pests, and due to striking similarities they are often confused. Both animals build tunnels under your lawns, but that does not mean they are the same. These two have many things that set them apart from one another. Moles are smaller than gophers, and have pointed snouts and large front claws. They do not feed on your lawn, but the insects

that dwell within. Sounds like they are helping you with the insects? Maybe, but the moles' tunnels leave mounds of dirt on the ground above, and their shallow tunnels cause uneven ground.

Gophers, the largest of the pesky pair, have buckteeth and small ears. These creatures love to dine on your grass and plant roots. Gophers also leave mounds of dirt, but they do far more damage underground, causing sinkholes. While your green may not encompass as many acres of the turf in the movie *Caddyshack*, they can cause just as much recurring trouble. Getting rid of gophers and moles leads to one grand solution– killing them. There are also more conventional methods, such as traps.

The best way to deal with pests though is to perhaps not have them at all. This can be achieved by taking preventative measures in your lawn. But of course, nature has a mind of its own!

For hundreds of other tips for creating your own perfect lawn, be sure to visit:

## **Basics Of Landscaping**

**By Sara Nightingale**

So you have a yard, but do you have landscaping? The best thing to do is to get back to the basics and start learning about landscaping from the soil up.

### It Starts with the Soil

In order for your soil to work as well as possible, you need to have it tested. Your soil might be perfect or it might just need some nitrogen. Soil engineers can test and analyze soil from different points in your yard to help your yard perform at its best.

What you need to understand about landscaping is that it serves more than just an artistic or aesthetic purpose. Landscaping is functional outdoor art, but it can also serve as a vehicle for privacy; landscaping can exist to attract certain insects or birds to your home; landscaping can be used to cover up your foundation that sticks out from the bottom of your siding, among other things.

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Good landscape designers are taught to utilize your landscaping for whatever you desire (security, privacy, etc) with a design that is pleasing to the eye and to the neighborhood. So think about what you are trying to get done with your landscaping. If you are trying to attract butterflies or keep neighbors from peering in, keep this in mind so that your landscaping can serve both purposes.

Simplicity is important in design and art. It's one of the best guidelines you can follow as a beginner or do it yourself. Just keep things simple to begin with. You can do more later on. Simplicity in planting, for instance, would be to pick two or three colors and repeat them in your landscape. Keep decor to a minimum and within a specific theme.

Balance is just as the word implies a sense of equality. There are basically two types of balance in landscape design: Symmetrical and Asymmetrical.

Symmetrical balance is when there are equally spaced matching elements in the garden design. With a garden equally divided, both sides could share all or part of the same shape, form, plant height, plant groupings, colors, bed shapes, theme, etc. Symmetrical design is somewhat of a mirror image or reflection. Asymmetrical is just the opposite.

After you have completed your landscaping you will be outside, sweating, and getting your hands dirty trying to get that green thumb.

Sara Nightingale is an avid gardener and landscaper who specializes in helping newcomers to beautify their outdoor surroundings



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