

What is Digging in my Yard?
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As temperatures decline, gardeners come out of their 'summer hibernation'. We resume doing the garden chores that we had to quit earlier because of the heat. Then we notice that something else has been digging in our garden. Is it friend or foe? Should I be concerned?

What made this hole in my yard? This can be a hard question to answer. Most holes do not indicate a problem. We can just fill them and ignore them.

Here is a 'mystery hole identification guide'. I borrowed it from materials released by Walter Reeves, host of the PBS gardening series, *The Georgia Gardener*. See his show at 12:30 pm on Saturdays. It is also rebroadcast at 7:00 pm as well.

First question - Is there dirt mounded up on top of or scattered around the hole?

If the answer is no, the hole was probably caused by soil settling into a buried trash or refuse pit or rotting stump or decomposing root. This is very common and can occur repeatedly in the same area. The settling can occur even though the gardener does not remember anything being buried in that area. These holes can be of many different sizes and shapes.

If the answer is 'Yes' then some yet-to-be-determined creature put the dirt there. Answer these questions to try to determine the culprit.

Second set of questions - How big is the hole? What does the soil look like? Where is the hole?

12 - 36 inch diameter hole, soil plowed up, often in flowerbed or lawn – armadillo.

6 - 10 inch diameter hole, soil not mounded, in lawn - skunk or raccoon.

2 inch diameter hole several inches deep, no mound or soil may be pulled to one side, middle of the lawn or in beds - squirrel digging.

2 inch diameter hole that often goes deep into the ground, small mound, under a shrub or concrete slab - chipmunk or rat.

2 inch diameter hole with a small mound, in lawn with raised tunnel nearby - mole. The two to three inch wide tunnel is most diagnostic for moles.

1 inch diameter hole, no mound, next to hosta or woody plant. Woody plant roots may be chewed. You will often see fine tooth marks on the plant – vole.

1 inch diameter hole, soil thinly scattered around hole, middle of the yard or in bed - cicada killer wasp.

1 inch diameter hole, two inch high pile of mud blobs, near creek, pond or other wet area - crayfish. This is not commonly seen in central Georgia.

One-fourth inch diameter hole, mound two inches high & wide, several in middle of the yard - ground bee.

No hole, mound two inches high & wide of granulated soil, middle of the lawn - earthworms.

Although most creatures create a soil mound when they dig, one exception is the cicada. They form small, inch or less wide holes in lawns when they emerge in the late summer. There is seldom any dirt pushed up around the hole. You can hear them 'singing' in the trees in the afternoon and evening.

Mole crickets are often blamed for making holes. This is seldom the case. Mole crickets form finger width tunnels in the soil of lawns and gardens.

If you have a hole you are concerned about, just fill it in with soil. Filling the hole may solve the problem. If something re-opens the hole by pushing the soil out, then try to find the culprit. If the soil settles down into the hole, then you are just experiencing soil settling. As long as the hole is small, soil settling is nothing to be concerned about.