The 13 lined ground squirrels

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Pesky, a difficult word to describe and quantify. Children sometimes get that designation. Dennis the Menace would easily receive that title from an annoyed Mr. Wilson in that classic comic strip. Flies and mosquitoes have an unwanted affinity towards humans. Their love of us is based on their personal needs and definitely not ours. They seem to have an “it's all about me” attitude.

For anyone that tries to maintain a lovely yard, there are several uninvited guests who are pesky. Moles bring out the ire in many people. They can turn some of the nicest sweetest people into various killers. The words, “I want them dead” have been uttered from the lips of many people I have talked with over the years. A mouse in the house will also get that same reception.

Then there are those where a few are cute, but add some more and they have outgrown their welcome. That has been my experience with a yard pest known as “The 13 lined ground squirrels”. I remember a time when there were just a few in my yard and the holes they dug were annoying but tolerable. Then, they multiplied.

A female can give birth to 7-10 hole digging youngsters that like to live a solitary life. Thus, they eventually populate the yard, propelling the homeowner into frustration and a “get them at any cost” mentality.

These ground squirrels are most active during hot sunny days when humans are ready to park in the shade. They prefer to scurry about with temperatures between 86°F and 104°F. They like low-grass vegetation like our manicured lawns and thus are commonly found in golf courses, cemeteries, and parks. Agricultural and residential development have actually increased the range of the thirteen-lined ground squirrel as they have adapted well to low-cut grass.

The burrows they dig are 15 to 20 feet long and often have more than one entrance. They also have escape burrows that are shorter and have only one entrance. A place to get away from any roaming menace like the neighborhood cat. They are also a little bit of a neat freak as mounds of soil near their 2-inch entrance holes are seldom present because the ground squirrels will scatter the excavated soil. Active holes have a clean and well-manicured appearance and the grass is well worn from frequent use.

It all boils down to they’re cute but how do I get rid of them. That is never an easy question. One answer is to let the grass grow taller. They do not like tall grass where predators can hide. Keep your lawn mowed at 3 inches and it will help discourage them and it’s great for grass health. Obviously, where firearms can be used, will reduce their numbers. The use of live animal traps may be the only solution. Placing a small trap near their hole baited with nuts or birdseed will eventually be effective.

I once heard of some kids that were putting water-filled jugs over a hole that a squirrel went down, the squirrel would then pop back up into the jug. I did this immediately, after seeing a squirrel that went down, with a milk jug. He came back up but was too big to fit through the milk jug hole. So, water in a hole right after they just went down does work, but then you have to figure out what to do next.

Today, as I write this, is 17 degrees outside. The 13 lined ground squirrel is hibernating below the ground waiting on March and its chance to become either a pesky little rodent or that cute addition to your landscape. You make the choice.