THEY HELP THE SOIL. DON'T SPRAY THEM.

Earthworm Activity in West Texas Lawns

A homeowner's guide for San Angelo and Central West Texas

Those dark, lumpy soil piles that show up after rain or watering are usually earthworm castings — worm waste. Earthworms do not feed on grass leaves or roots. The usual complaint is a messy or uneven surface, mud on shoes, and a mower smeared or dulled when piles are cut wet — not dead turf. University sources treat earthworms as beneficial soil animals. Killing them is usually not necessary or advisable, and no pesticide is labeled for that use on a home lawn.

1 · CONFIRM IT

Look at the piles

- **What they look like:** dark, lumpy or pellet-like piles, about the size of a fist or smaller, usually with little or no open hole. Fresh piles are often darker and slightly shiny; they harden into bumps as they dry.
- **When they show up:** after rain or irrigation, most often in spring and fall, when the soil is cool to mild and stays moist. They are common on irrigated West Texas lawns even though the climate is semi-arid. Frequent, shallow watering keeps worms near the surface.

LOOK-ALIKES

Not every mound is a worm

- **Fire ants:** fine, loose soil, not moist pellets. Ants pour out if the mound is disturbed. Fire ants are a major West Texas pest.
- **Pocket gophers:** much larger fan- or crescent-shaped dumps of dug-out soil. Botta's pocket gopher is found in Tom Green County.
- **A clear, lasting hole** the size of a pencil eraser is more typical of bees or wasps, not worms.

If you are not sure, bring a close-up photo to the counter.

2 · THEY'RE NOT A PEST

Worms don't eat the grass

University sources agree: earthworms are not turf pests in the usual sense. The mounds do not harm the grass. The mess is almost all at the surface — a bumpier lawn that is easier to scalp, and mud that smears when piles are wet. On thin turf, very thick dried piles can occasionally smother a small patch; that is uncommon on a dense lawn.

Their tunneling loosens soil, improves water and air movement, and helps break down thatch. A worm population is a sign of a healthy soil — and those benefits matter on our clay loams, which can seal and compact under foot traffic and irrigation.

3 · SMOOTH THE SURFACE

Leave the worms. Change the watering and the mowing.

Let the piles dry first

Rake, sweep, drag, or mow after the piles have dried. Do not mow while they are wet — that smears mud and dulls the blade.

Water deeply, less often

Let the surface dry between irrigations. This is also standard AgriLife advice for West Texas lawns, and it moves worms deeper.

Mow at the high end

Use the recommended height for your grass. Bermudagrass is mowed much shorter than St. Augustine or buffalograss. Taller, denser turf hides many casts.

Core-aerate, don't roll

Aerate bumpy or thin lawns while the grass is growing well, and leave the cores. A heavy roller flattens bumps but compacts the soil and can thin the lawn.

4 · THE LAW

The label is the law. Do not apply a pesticide to kill earthworms.

No pesticide currently registered by the EPA was found that is labeled for earthworm control on home lawns. Using a lawn insecticide — or any pesticide — just to kill earthworms is an off-label use and is against federal law. Texas rules say the same thing. Some insecticides can harm worms as a side effect when used for other labeled pests; that does not make earthworm control a legal use. Using a fertilizer or any unlabeled material to kill earthworms is not a legal or recommended option either. BES-TEX does not sell a pesticide for earthworm control, because a legally labeled product for that use was not found.

For lawn care professionals: The same legal limit applies. Do not apply carbaryl, imidacloprid, or any other insecticide, fungicide, or fertilizer to reduce worm numbers or casts. A professional program can still help: confirm the piles, switch the client to deeper, less frequent irrigation, raise mowing height within the species range, drag or brush casts when dry, and core-aerate during active growth. University sources do not support killing worms to stop moles, and armadillo digging in this county has more than one possible food source.

Bring a close-up photo.

If you are not sure what you are looking at, bring a photo of the piles to 4512 Adobe Dr. We'll look at it with you. Questions about rakes or aeration tools can be settled at the counter, Monday through Friday, 8 AM to 5 PM.

Call 325.653.1300

Sources: Texas A&M AgriLife Extension; university turf programs including Kansas State, Wisconsin, Iowa State, California IPM, and Minnesota; EPA pesticide labels and FIFRA; 4 Texas Administrative Code §7.71; USDA and NOAA climate and soils records. This sheet is a research summary, not a product label.

Read the full research summary