



## Controlling Slugs and Snails

**Signs** - Irregular holes are eaten from leaves, slime trails often left around the plants on the soil and the leaves

**Damage** - Young plants and seedlings are particularly vulnerable and can be stripped bare or eaten down to the ground. They are particularly fond of Hosta and Delphiniums.

**Treatment** - Treatments abound for slugs and snails so there's no choice of options to try. My own personal approach is to not grow anything that they like eating apart from the plant you love. When the new shoots are emerging in the spring, scatter mini slug pellets around them and stop when the leaves are large enough to be less tasty to the slugs.

**These animals feed mainly at night** so if you are particularly bothered, you can go out and manually pick them off those plants most under attack.

**Rings of material that is uncomfortable to cross** such as sharp grit or broken egg shells will sometimes discourage them, I did see an experiment on this though on a gardening program and they happily crossed everything in their path.

**Plants in pots can be protected by greasing the rim with Vaseline and salt.**

An old remedy to deter snails and slugs is to collect as many as possible, morning and evening. **Tip them into a bucket of boiling water** and let it stand for a few days until the smell becomes fearsome, then strain off the liquid and use it to sprinkle round vulnerable plants, such as the young growth of delphiniums, lettuce and so on - but not on them. The remains of the slugs and snails can also be scattered.

**Sprinkle slugs with salt to kill them** (if you can stand the resulting agony).

Trap them using containers in the ground, slightly propped up pie tins or plant pots that have various baits in them though you still have to get rid of them which can be a problem if you don't hate your neighbor.

Suggested baits:

Empty grapefruit halves - lemons and oranges also work but grapefruit is best.

Beer - the slug pub!

Yeast - mix some with water and a bit of sugar

Potato cut in half - place cut half downwards

- **You can deal with your captured slugs and snails in a number of ways** according to taste. Placing them out for the birds may work, but the slugs and snails invariably make a run for it so some escape.

Another way to deal with your captured slugs and snails is to put them in a plastic Tupperware type container and then **put them in the freezer**. This is probably the most humane way as they just slow down and become torpid in the cold being cold blooded (yes they do have blood of sorts). So they are effectively anaesthetized before being frozen, put the carcasses on the compost heap.

- **Plastic bottles.** Take a 1.5 Ltr. or 2 Ltr. clear plastic bottle and cut off the base with scissors. Remove the stopper and place over a single plant. A simple but effective way of protecting tender plants from slugs or the weather.
- Go out to the garden in the late afternoon and lay boards or pieces of cardboard on the bare soil around your plants. In the morning turn the boards over and scrape the hiding slugs into a large yogurt or cottage cheese container.
- Animal control, ducks, chickens, frogs, toads and turtles all eat slugs and snails and can be used in a fenced yard or greenhouse as appropriate.

Another option is to go for **biological control**. Biological control of a pest relies on introducing a predator species so "fighting nature with nature", if chosen carefully, the predator will stop damage to your plants without damaging the environment. Such biological controls are safe for the user, children and pets. They will not harm other beneficial garden insects and are biodegradable.

They do rely on the predator always having some food though, or they will die out, so like other organic practices it is a question of maintaining a small population of pests to allow the predators to be ready for them, in this case though the balance is skewed away from the problem.

For slugs and snails, the biological control is a Nematode worm sold as "**Nemaslug**". The nematodes aggressively search out and attack slugs. They enter the slugs body through a hole behind their heads (the pulmonary aperture that they breathe through to be precise). Once inside they release a bacteria which stops the slug eating. The nematodes then start to reproduce inside and within 7-10 days the slug is dead. The nematodes continue to reproduce as the body breaks down. This new population enters the soil and searches out new slugs to attack. This is a natural, non-toxic product that is safe for both users and wildlife. The nematodes stay active for 6 weeks so a single dose protects plants when they are emerging in the spring and are most vulnerable.

Nematodes can only be used in late spring and summer when the soil has warmed up (to above 5°C). On heavy, waterlogged clay soil, the nematodes can find it difficult to move, so Nemaslug can be less effective in these conditions.

#### **Reasons to like slugs and snails:**

Go and look at them out in the garden after the rain has fallen and it's warm. **Watch them as they glide elegantly and effortlessly with their eye stalks and feelers moving this way and that and try not to be impressed.**

**There's something noble about the way that they face the world**, completely vulnerable with their soft bodies, unable to move quickly, not very aware of their surroundings and unable to do much to defend themselves other than retreat to a very thin shell or just cower in the

In historical times slugs and snails provided an **excellent source of protein** for the impoverished. Sometime unfortunately the poor widow with healthy strapping children living in a village with otherwise sickly children (with less resourceful parents) would be decried as a witch.

Snails of course as we all know are an attempt by a well meaning angel to cover up the fact that **God made slugs when he wasn't paying proper attention**. "I'll give them a little house, that'll make them look cute and then people will love them.....".

They provide **food** for thrushes, hedgehogs and many other animals.

**Slugs secrete and anesthetic. Native Americans used to suck on a slug when they had a toothache. No matter how much you think you like Hostas, slugs and snails will always have a deeper appreciation.**