

Snails and Slugs

Snails and slugs rank among our most detested garden pests. These slimy mollusks emerge at night and chew holes in the leaves and flowers of many garden plants and fruits. Snails and slugs favor seedlings and plants with succulent foliage including basil, marigolds, lettuce, beans, strawberries and potatoes. Slugs and snails are similar in structure and biology, except slugs lack the snails' external spiral shell. Management requires an integrated approach that includes eliminating moisture and hiding spots, trapping, barriers and handpicking.

How do you know snails and slugs are causing damage?

- ▶ You may not observe these pests at first because they feed at night and hide during the day. Go out at night or early in the morning to view them in action.
- ▶ Holes in leaves, flowers and fruit may be caused by other pests. Look for the shiny, slimy trails that slugs and snails leave behind.

What must be done to reduce snails and slugs?

- ▶ Remove daytime hiding places – ivy, weedy areas, debris or boards.
- ▶ Regularly remove snails from shelters you cannot eliminate, such as low ledges on fences, undersides of decks and meter boxes.
- ▶ Place traps in your garden and dispose of trapped snails and slugs daily.
- ▶ Reduce moist surfaces by switching to drip irrigation or sprinkling in the morning rather than later in the day.
- ▶ Consider snail-proof plants such as impatiens, geraniums, begonias, lantana, and many plants with stiff leaves and highly scented foliage like sage, rosemary and lavender.



How can I manage snails and slugs without using pesticides?

- Make sure the garden is mollusk-free before planting. Then erect a copper barrier around a garden area, or attach it to the edge of a raised bed. Copper foil can also be wrapped around planting boxes, headers or trunks. Snails and slugs will not cross copper.
- Place your garden in the sunniest spot possible. Remove garden objects or adjacent plants or ground cover that may serve as a shady shelter.
- Build a trap using a 12"x15" board raised off the ground by one-inch runners. As mollusks collect under the board, scrape them off and destroy them daily.

What about baits?

- Baits will not be very effective unless combined with the removal of shelter, food and moisture.
- Metaldehyde baits are especially poisonous to dogs and birds. Metaldehyde also loses its effectiveness rapidly in sunlight and after rain or irrigation.
- Iron phosphate baits are safe for use around dogs, children and wildlife.
- Irrigate before applying bait and choose a warm evening when mollusks are active.
- Scatter bait around sprinklers and in moist protected areas where snails and slugs travel.



Snails:

- Hard protective shell



Snails and Slugs:

- Soft extensible tentacles with eyes at tips
- Muscular "foot" which secretes a trail of mucus

Be sure to read product labels carefully and follow all instructions on proper use, storage and disposal of pesticides.

Minimize or avoid the use of products that contain diazinon and chlorpyrifos – these materials are polluting our waterways.

For more information contact the UC Master Gardeners at (916) 875-6913, Monday - Friday, 9 a.m. to noon, and 1 - 4 p.m., or visit the UCIPM Web site at www.ipm.ucdavis.edu.



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