

## SLUGS

Slugs are best described as snails without shells. They are a type of mollusk, related to clams and oysters. Slugs are soft bodied, generally brownish or grayish, with eye stalks. They vary in size from 1/4 inch to two inches or longer. Slugs leave a silvery slime trail that they secrete as they move. Because of their mouthparts, they create irregularly shaped holes. Feeding damage can be cosmetic, however extensive feeding can result in plant stress or even death.

Slugs usually overwinter as eggs in protected sites on the ground, such as under plant debris, mulch, or boards. Warm, dry conditions are less favorable to them. Rake your garden in early spring to remove leaves, plant debris and slug eggs. Also remove boards and other material to reduce favorable areas for slugs. Avoid using large wood chips as they provide hiding places for slugs. Do not place mulch any thicker than three inches. This helps protect plants from weeds and helps maintain plant moisture while minimizing a favorable environment for slugs.

Water your garden only when necessary. Irrigate in the morning so plants are dry by evening. Prune lower leaves or stake large plants to reduce potential hiding places for slugs and to allow better air circulation that helps keep the soil surface drier. Thin or divide plants if they are too crowded.

Copper is an effective barrier to slugs. Copper strips or tape sold specifically for slug control can be purchased from garden suppliers. Caution: The sharp edges of some products may cause safety problems, especially for young children. Copper barriers are most practical for small gardens and containers.

Diatomaceous earth (tiny fossilized skeletons of ancient aquatic diatoms) is moderately effective as a slug barrier. When slugs come in contact with diatomaceous earth, it is abrasive to their skin. Diatomaceous earth is most effective when used in dry conditions and has little effect when it absorbs moisture.

Trapping and handpicking helps lower slug numbers. To be effective, traps must be checked and cleaned out several times a week. Trap slugs by setting out several flat boards, shingles or damp newspapers. Check under these traps the next morning and kill any slugs that are hiding. You can drown slugs in soapy water, crush them. Traps

containing beer or other fermenting food are popular. You can purchase commercially available slug traps or make your own. Sink jars, cans, pans or similar containers into the ground so the top is level with the ground (some commercially available traps are placed on the ground). Pour beer or a water and yeast mixture (one teaspoon of yeast to three ounces of water) or similar fermenting liquid into the container. Slugs are attracted to the odors, fall in and drown.

The **Master Gardener Hotline** is open from April to October, Monday through Friday. Lines are available 9:00 am to noon and 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm at 888-678-3464

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