Snails & Slugs in the Home Garden

Snails and slugs are small soft-bodied animals that can be troublesome pests in the garden. They are very similar to each other except snails have hard shells and slugs do not. They can cause serious damage in the garden, and often remain unseen, since they feed at night or on rainy days. During the day they can be found hiding in damp places such as in thick groundcovers or under flower pots. The most characteristic signs of their presence are the trails of mucus they leave wherever they crawl.

Type of Damage
Snails and slugs feed on both decaying and living plant material. Parts of plants that can be affected include leaves, stems and below-ground parts. They produce large, ragged holes and can completely consume young seedlings.

A very wide variety of plant materials can be affected and they are especially troublesome on hostas, strawberries, lettuce and cabbage.

Snail and slug damage begins in the spring and continues to occur until the first frost. These pests are particularly found in wet, damp areas, since moisture is required for their survival. During drought conditions their activity decreases.

Controls
Discourage snails and slugs by removing mulch and leaf litter near plants. When found, these pests can be removed by handpicking or by making simple, effective traps. Trap snails and slugs in shallow pans of stale beer sunken deep enough so the container lip is even with the soil surface. Replace beer as necessary as it dries up or becomes diluted by rainfall. A pie pan suspended with nails over the pan of beer will help to keep out rain, as well as dogs and cats.

Snails and slugs can also be attracted with pieces of potato or cabbage placed underneath a board, and then collected and destroyed during the day. Protect young seedlings by sprinkling diatomaceous earth around the plants. Diatomaceous earth is very sharp and scratches the skin of these soft-bodied critters, resulting in dehydration and death. It must be reapplied after a rain or watering.

Pesticide baits are also effective for controlling snails and slugs, but should only be used as a last resort. Products containing metaldehyde bait can be used to control snails and slugs around certain fruits and vegetables in the home garden. However, many newer products now contain iron phosphate, are much safer, and can be used around most fruit and vegetable plants in the garden. Examples of available iron phosphate baits are:

A slug and slug feeding damage on potato foliage. They can climb to the top of a mature plant to feed.
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• Bayer Advanced Dual Action Snail & Slug Killer Bait,
• Bayer Advanced Natria Snail & Slug Killer Bait,
• Bonide Slug Magic Pellets – Makes Slugs Disappear,
• Espoma Earth-tone Bug & Slug Control,
• Gardens Alive Escar-Go Slug & Snail Control,
• Garden Safe Slug & Snail Bait,
• Monterey Sluggo - Kills Slugs & Snails,
• Natural Guard Bug, Slug & Snail Bait,
• Schultz Garden Safe Slug and Snail Bait,
• Brandt Sluggo Plus T & O
  (also contains spinosad).
• Monterey Ant Control Bait
  (also contains spinosad, & controls slugs).

Iron phosphate will stop feeding by the snails and slugs quickly, and is much less harmful to pets, birds, and non-target insects than metaldehyde. Any unconsumed iron phosphate bait adds nutrients (iron and phosphorus) to the soil. Consult the label for the specific crops it can be used around and also for information on the rate. Products containing mesurol should NOT be used in the home garden.


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