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# Slugs in the garden



## Slug facts

Slugs and snails belong to the group of animals known as molluscs, which also includes squids and octopus!

A single slug has about 27,000 teeth and can live for up to 6 years.

Some slugs live above ground but some spend most of their time under the soil.

1 cubic metre of soil can contain 50 slugs.

## Dealing with slugs in the garden

Whatever your feelings towards these creatures there is no doubt that some species are a pest in the garden. Whether you remove, kill or deter them is up to you.



### 1 Carry out a 'slug hunt'.

Slugs tend to hide in damp cool places during the day so if you do a search there, you should catch them before they start moving onto plants. Some gardeners go hunting for them at night (when slugs are more active) using a torch!



### 2 Trap your slugs

The simplest trap is to place a piece of damp cardboard or the outer peel of half orange or grapefruits onto a patch of soil near your crops. Slugs will shelter under this damp environment and next day you can simply pick up the traps, slugs and all, and remove.

A baited trap is another alternative; here you attract slugs using liquid bait such as milk or yeasty liquid (1 tsp yeast to ½ pint water). The trap can be any kind of small shallow container (yoghurt pots or margarine tubs are good).

Sink the traps into the ground leaving a 1cm lip to prevent beetles and other creatures accidentally falling in. Once the trap is in place fill it with your 'attractant'. Check daily as drowned slugs can begin to smell in hot weather.

Place slug feeding stations near your crops (lettuce or cabbage leaves work well). Slugs prefer to eat dead and dying vegetation; they will be attracted to these leaves and can simply be collected up the following day.

### What to do with trapped slugs?

Put them in a wildlife area or into your compost bin – the ready supply of decaying plant material will ensure they stay there rather than returning to your garden.

Drop them into a bucket containing soapy water, so they drown. Use vegetable soap (not harmful detergents) and the mixture will be safe to add to the compost heap.

Dropping the slugs into scalding hot water will kill them, and you can then add the resulting mixture to the compost heap

Immersion in a strong salt solution or sprinkling with salt will kill the slug by dehydration, but it looks horrible. Remember not to add salty water to compost heaps.



### 3 Poison your slugs

Traditional slug pellets contain metaldehyde which can be toxic to other beneficial wildlife, however there are pellets containing ferric phosphate or aluminium sulphate that can be used by organic gardeners.



## Biological control

One remedy you can purchase is nematodes (Nemaslug). These tiny microscopic eelworms are watered into the soil and infect and kill slugs underground. Nematodes enter slugs through natural openings (mouth, breathing pore) and release bacteria that infect the slugs, which stop from feeding and die within a week.



## Barriers

Surround plants with a physical barrier using materials that slugs dislike crossing;

- Grit, wool, broken eggshells and sandpaper are good to try
- Plastic bottle cloches with vaseline smeared around the top
- Copper and aluminium foil as the metal gives them a little electric shock

## Minimising damage

Grow seedlings on in modules or containers rather than direct sowing so they are larger and more resilient to attack when planted in the garden.

A number of natural predators will readily feast on slugs including frogs & toads, slow-worms, some birds, hedgehogs, centipedes, ground beetles and rove beetles. See resource Creating Wildlife Habitats for more details on how to encourage them into the garden.

Sacrificial planting – plant a species the slugs love to eat near your crops, comfrey is a useful plant to

use and it has the additional benefits of attracting other beneficial insects into the garden and being a valuable plant feed / compost addition. A smaller alternative is pansies.

Deterrent planting – Plant strongly smelling plants like chives, garlic, scented geraniums, fennel or mint around the garden as slugs may avoid these areas.

Regularly dig or hoe the top couple of inches of soil around crops to expose slug eggs so they either dry out or get eaten by birds.

## Further work



Look for slugs and snails, and their eggs, in the garden and remove them. The pictures below should help you identify some of the worst offenders, their eggs and the damage they can cause.



Conduct a trial to see which method of protection is most effective. Get children to design a method of trapping / deterring the slugs and then monitor to see which catches the most slugs, or if a deterrent, which crops survive the best.

1



1 Common garden snail on broccoli

2



2 Slug eggs in soil

3



3 Gray field slug (buff coloured)

4



4 Large black slug

5



5 Keeled slug on potato

6



6 Keeled slug damage on potato

(Photographs Copyright: RHS.)



If you garden in raised beds an edge of copper tape used in conjunction with a biological control (nematodes) can be an effective reduction technique.