



Slugs

Dr. Alan T. Eaton, Extension Specialist, Entomology

Description

Slugs are slimy, soft-bodied, grayish, orange or brownish mottled mollusks – snails without shells. Slugs vary in length up to 4 inches and leave a slimy silver-colored trail wherever they travel. They can become serious pests in and around the home, garden, and greenhouse.

Habits

Slugs feed on decaying organic matter, molds and a variety of living plants including strawberries, beans, peas, cabbage, corn, lettuce, tomatoes, as well as many ornamental plants. They feed at night and hide during the day in dark, cool, moist protected places, such as under clods of dirt, boards, stones, plant refuse, mulch and flower pots.

Slugs become active in early spring and reproduce by laying eggs throughout the growing season. They are particularly troublesome in damp, shaded areas and near areas of dense, moist vegetation. They can be a year-round problem in greenhouses and are often found in cellars and vegetable storage areas.

Slug damage to plants, caused by chewing or rasping the tissue, can be confused with the damage caused by chewing insects. However, slugs give themselves away by leaving shiny trails of slime and droppings. They can often be found hiding under nearby objects.

Control

Prevention and non-chemical control

Slugs can often be controlled by eliminating their hiding places and reducing moisture in their surroundings. Remove rotting boards, flats, pots and debris left on the ground or stored in the basement. Select a garden spot in an open area free of damp spots and eliminate dense vegetation around the perimeter of the area. Remove crop refuse such as pea or bean vines as soon as harvest has been completed. Most mulches encourage slugs, so eliminating mulch is an option to consider.

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Stop!

Stop! Read the label on every pesticide container each time before using the material. Pesticides must be applied only as directed on the label to be in compliance with the law. All pesticides listed in this publication are contingent upon continued registration. Contact the Division of Pesticide Control at (603) 271-3550 to check registration status. Dispose of empty containers safely, according to NH regulations.

A thin band of wood ashes spread as a barrier around plants can discourage slugs from attacking them.

Trap slugs in vegetable gardens and around ornamental plantings by setting out shallow saucers of beer or water containing a pinch of baker's yeast or leave an overturned half-cantaloupe or grapefruit rind in the garden. Check rinds in the morning and destroy any slugs found there. Slugs will also congregate under asphalt shingles whose upper surface is covered with aluminum foil.

Chemical control

There are various sprays and baits registered to control slugs around homes, in the garden, or in a greenhouse. Baits usually contain metaldehyde or iron phosphate. Sometimes boric acid is used. Sprays are less likely to work on larger slugs. Their active ingredients include soaps, deltamethrin, and others. Dry treatments include silicon dioxide and diatomaceous earth. There are several chemicals approved for slug control in certain water systems (like cooling systems, wastewater plants, etc.), including copper sulfate and gluteral. If you use any of these pesticides, be sure to follow all label instructions. *Caution! Slug baits may resemble pet food. Do not leave baits where domestic pets, songbirds, or children may discover and eat them.*

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About the Author

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