



Slugs and Snails



Snails and slugs are among the most destructive pests found in gardens and landscapes and can be active year round. Both snails and slugs are members of the mollusk phylum and are similar in structure and biology, except that slugs lack the snail's external spiral shell. These mollusks move by gliding along on a muscular "foot." This muscle constantly secretes mucus, which facilitates their movement and later dries to form the silvery slime trail that signals the recent presence of either pest. Snails and slugs feed on a variety of living plants and on decaying plant matter. They create irregular holes with smooth edges on leaves and flowers by scraping with their rasp-like tongues. Snail and slug damage can be confused with feeding by other pests such as earwigs, caterpillars, or other chewing insects. Look for silvery mucous trails to confirm that slugs or snails caused the damage, rather than other pests.

A good snail and slug management program relies on a combination of methods. The first step is to eliminate, as much as possible, all places where they can hide during the day. Boards, stones, debris, weedy areas around tree trunks, leafy branches growing close to the ground, and dense ground covers, such as ivy, are ideal sheltering spots. Though baits can be part of a management program, it is best to use them in conjunction with habitat modification, especially in gardens that contain plenty of shelter, food, and moisture. Other methods used to control slugs and snails include trapping, hand picking, installing barriers made of copper foil or tape and planting resistant plants. Some plants these pests will seriously damage include basil, beans, cabbage, dahlia, delphinium, hosta, lettuce, marigolds, strawberries, and many other vegetable plants. Plants not attractive to these pests include plants with highly scented foliage, such as lavender, rosemary, and sage and some commonly grown plants including ferns, cyclamen, hydrangea, California poppy, nasturtium, and lantana.

Several types of snail and slug bait products (molluscicides) are available. Snail and slug baits can be effective when used properly and in conjunction with a cultural program that incorporates the other methods discussed above. Baits alone will not effectively control snails or slugs in the long term.

For more information see the UCIPM Pest Note about slugs and snails at <http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn7427.html>. This website includes links to short videos describing slug and snail identification, damage, baiting and methods of trapping.

Reference for this article. Wilen, C.A. and Flint, M. L. Pest Notes: Snails and Slugs. UC ANR Publication 7427.

A UC Glenn County Master Gardner is available to answer your questions about garden and landscape plants at the Plant Clinic on Wednesday afternoon from 2 to 4 PM in the UC Cooperative Extension Office in Orland, phone: 530-865-1107. You can also send an email to anrmgglenn@ucanr.edu or submit a question on our website at <http://ucanr.edu/sites/glenngmg/>.

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