



## Slugs and Snails in the Garden

Warmer weather is finally here! I have enjoyed working in my garden this spring. My annual beds have been prepared for the planting of petunias and celosia. The hostas and roses in my garden are absolutely beautiful. While I was working in my garden, I started thinking about garden pests that will be looking to feed on my precious plants. Slugs and snails came to mind.

Slugs and snails can be serious garden pests. These pests are not insects but are mollusks that are closely related to mussels and clams. They have similar characteristics except snails have an external, spiral shell. They both glide with a long, flat, muscular organ called a foot. The mucus or slime secreted from the foot dries to form a shiny white silvery trail indicating that the pests are present.

These garden pests are active at night or on dark, cloudy days. During the heat of the day, they seek relief under plants, rocks, wood, or compost piles. They need moisture to thrive but can survive in dry conditions by hiding in areas that are protected from the elements.

Slugs and snails feed on a wide variety of plant material whether living or decaying. They chew irregular holes that have smooth edges in leaves. They love to eat flowers and clip off small plant parts. Do I need to mention that they love hostas, daylilies and marigolds?



What about controlling slugs and snails? Remember that slugs and snails like areas that retain soil moisture and promote good plant growth. Water management is the key. They are always a problem under high moisture conditions. You can select resistant plants like begonias, geraniums and lantana or you can just handpick them off the plant. This, however, could be very time consuming.

How about using bait? Iron phosphate is a registered molluscicide that kills slugs and snails. It is a naturally occurring soil component and is less toxic to pets, birds and children. You can find this active ingredient under the trade name Sluggo. Once they feed on the bait, the snails and slugs stop feeding and then die in a few days. Always read and follow the label directions when using any pesticides.

I use the Sluggo product around my plants at home and have been satisfied with its effectiveness on the snails and slugs. I don't know about you but I can't bear to have snails or slugs eating holes on the foliage of my beautiful hosta. Until next time, happy gardening!



*Christopher Capen*