



All this cool wet weather “greened up” Green Country benefiting our lawns and gardens. It also set out the welcome mat for the snail’s slimy cousin, The Slug!

If you see shiny, silvery trails in your garden or on your walkway slugs are active in your garden. Slugs are slimy, soft bodied, legless creatures, basically snails without shells. They are not insects but are mollusks, related to clams and oysters. Slugs range in size from ½” – 4” long and are usually gray to brown in color. Their heads have two pairs of feelers, one set supporting the eyes, the other set for smelling. They produce slime to help them move. The silver trails that you see in your garden are dried slime.

Slugs overwinter as eggs in protected areas such plant debris – yet one more good reason for fall garden clean up! The eggs can survive under mulch and even in the soil. They hatch in spring or early summer and are active as long as they have damp, cool conditions. Slugs usually feed at night, but they will feed in the daytime on cloudy and rainy days. Wet conditions, poorly drained soil, and heavy shaded areas attract them.

Because slugs thrive in cool, shady, protected spots, they prefer plants that grow in full to part shade over plants growing in full sun. They have file-like mouthparts that rasp and chew plant tissue creating irregularly shaped holes in leaves, flowers, and fruit. Mature plants can usually tolerate moderate slug damage, but severe slug damage can seriously damage young plants and reduce fruit and vegetable harvests.

Cultural Control

Slugs are active in the evening so you can make your garden less attractive to slugs by watering in the morning. Plants will be dry before they come out to feed. Drip irrigation and soaker hoses can help because they only water the roots and don't wet leaves, flowers, and fruit, thus making your garden less inviting. Careful hand watering helps, too. If your soil does not drain well, add compost to improve drainage.

Thin or divide crowded plants to improve air circulation. Prune lower branches of shrubs and bushes to allow more sunlight to reach the soil. Stake plants to raise them off the surface of the soil and away from slugs. Rocks, boards, and containers are great hiding places for slugs, so it is a good idea to remove them, if possible. Copper foil or tape barriers will discourage slugs from containers and small areas. The copper must be wide enough to accommodate the entire slug.

Earth-Kind Control

Look for slugs on the underside of leaves and handpick them off. Squash any slugs you find or drown them in soapy water. Set out flat boards, shingles or lay down sheets of damp

newspaper on the ground as traps. Check under these each morning and kill any slugs hiding there. Bury a six-inch container so the top is level with the ground. Fill it with beer or a water and yeast mixture (one teaspoon of yeast to every three ounces of warm water). The liquid should be about one inch below the top of the container. Slugs are attracted by the smell and will drown when they fall in for a drink. Be sure to clean out the trap several time a week and refill as needed. Continue trapping until you do not see any new slug damage. Diatomaceous earth is coarse and will scratch up slugs as they move but is less effective as a deterrent because it needs dry conditions to work.

Chemical Control

If these methods do not work, there are chemical pesticides such as iron phosphate, ferric sodium, EDTA, and metaldehyde bates available. Be aware that the pesticide that kills slugs may also kill beneficial insects and harm pets and wildlife. Always read and follow all pesticide label directions.

Sources:

University of Minnesota Extension “Slugs in Home Gardens”

[OSU Extension Service HLA-6432 Earth Kind Gardening Series “Mechanical Pest Controls”](#)

[OSU Extension Service E-1011 “Arthropod Pest Management in Greenhouses and Interiorscapes”](#)