

Slugs

The Problem

Slugs are one of the most serious garden pests, eating everything from seedlings to leaves and stems to maturing fruit. Even a few slugs in your garden bed can be devastating since each slug can eat its own body weight in food several times each day.

Identification

Appearance:

- Slugs are not insects, but are “shell-less terrestrial gastropod mollusks,” more closely related to clams or squid.
- Slugs look something like a really fat worm with a couple of fleshy antennae sticking out of their head. Most are gray, dull orange or dark brown, and from 1 to 3 inches long.
- Since slugs feed at night, you will probably see signs of slug damage well before you see any actual slugs. Also, you may notice their glossy slime trails across the garden soil or the wood frame on your garden bed.



Signs of damage:

- Rather than a few chewing teeth, slugs have thousands of very small teeth for rasping vegetation. Therefore, their feeding creates holes with jagged edges rather than the smooth-edged holes left by caterpillars.



Slugs



Controls

- Slugs are actually quite easy to kill. An Internet search for “control garden slugs” will lead to dozens and dozens of ideas. The slugs’ survival and persistence is due to the fact that they can reproduce quickly and that they go unnoticed until the larger adults have caused significant damage.
- Slugs lay eggs on the surface of the soil, under leaves, bark, twigs or other plant debris. Therefore, one of the most effective controls is — once again — **sanitation**: cleaning up and disposing of all plant debris.



- Slugs are as slow moving as their shell-bearing relatives, the snails; however, they are persistent and can travel as far as 40 feet in order to feed.
- A popular means of controlling them is to make crawling over your garden bed an unpleasant experience. This can be accomplished using coffee grounds (which also provide fertilizer), **diatomaceous earth**, crushed egg shells, crushed lava rock, and a number of other rough surfaces you can find reference on the web.
- Chives, mint, garlic, geraniums, foxgloves and fennel are all plants that — to one degree or another — can repel slugs. More information is available on

Slugs

the web. <https://www.slughelp.com/vegetables-herbs-slugs-not-like-plants-resistant-slugs-snails/>

- Commercial slug baits.....with iron phosphate. (Sluggo, Slug Magic, Garden Safe Slug and Snail Bait) Avoid baits that contain methiocarb or metaldehyde as they are toxic to mammals.
- **Beer traps** are a quick and effective way to eliminate slugs. They also let you keep track of the size and numbers you kill. On the downside, they can also kill some beneficial insects.
- **Commercially produced slug traps** come with covers to keep out the rain and — presumably — some of the beneficial insects that fly around.
- **Boards**, watermelon rinds on the ground, **orange or grapefruit rinds** offer slugs a shelter where they can spend the day. These need to be tended to often or else they only help slugs reproduce faster.



Barriers are physical structures that in some way prevent slugs from migrating into your planting bed. Ones made with copper are said to be the most effective since the copper reacts with the slug's slime and gives them an electric shock.



On the other hand, some websites inform you that you could capture slugs and take them home to keep as pets. [À chacun son goûts.](#)

Other resources:

<https://learn.eartheasy.com/guides/natural-slug-control/>

Slugs

Beer Traps

- (“What would become of the garden if the gardener treated...the slugs...as he would like to be treated if he were in their place”? — Thomas Huxley)
- The most simple beer traps are just a plastic drinking cup, sunk partly into the soil and filled part way up with beer. Since it's the yeast in the beer that's the chief attractant, you can get away with the cheap stuff.
 - A variation on the cup sunk in the soil is to build a shelter (as seen in the photo on the left) to keep the rain from diluting the beer
- Of course, you could just mix yeast and water and use that, but the alcohol probably finishes them off more quickly than just drowning them. [Unverified assertion.]
- It's important to check the traps frequently and empty the contents — beer, dead slugs and all — onto the ground away from your bed. If the traps aren't emptied frequently they'll develop into a moldy, smelly, thoroughly nasty sludge.



Commercially produced slug traps. Depending on the quantity, you can purchase these for about \$5 apiece. On the other hand, you can produce your own by — for example — turning over an empty coffee container and cutting access holes in the rim. The cup of beer goes in the middle.