

Slugs



The Good... The Bad... and the Ugly...

If you ever asked yourself, what would be the perfect pet, you probably considered what would be involved; how many times do you have to walk them each day, how many times would you have to feed them per day and thought to yourself, minimum is best, maybe a gold fish...

Well, what if I could offer you a pet that you never have to walk, and never have to feed as long as you left him in the yard. All you'd need to do is provide shade, moisture and lots of lovely flowers for him to devour?

What YOU need is a pet slug!

They are easy to keep track of, just follow their trail of slime.

Never never have to be fed, they can find all they need in your garden, and very little entertainment is needed, just a nice, juicy bed of newly planted plants!

Believe it or not, there are actual slug-lover groups out there! It's true! They have slug races, slug judging and even have slug conferences to discuss their mating habits.

Did you know that after mating a female slug bites the males... well, never mind, we won't go there. Oh, and if they don't have a mate, they can even mate themselves. They each have both the female and male organs.. Just think it only takes one and you'd have a zillion slugs in your back yard in no time. *Isn't that a LOVELY thought?*

Jokes aside, there REALLY is a good side to slugs.

I have explored many many books as well as the internet and have learned that in the right environment, slugs do good stuff! If you'd like a list of these resources, let me know and I'll email them to you. Meanwhile, slide this way while I show you the many sides and slime.... of the slugs of the Pacific Northwest!

The Good...

Where would our Sitka Spruce be without the lowly slug?

Slugs play an important role in ecology by eating decomposing matter... turning it into fertilizer that can be dissolved and broke down by rain, sinking deep down to the roots of our mighty spruce.

Do YOU Enjoy the song of the Varied Thrush-that beautiful high-pitched tune we hear in our spruce forests in the early morning? Thrushes, blackbirds and robins, starlings, rooks and crows, jays, ducks, sea gulls and even owls all benefit from a little slug in their diet!



The Bad

But, of course, it's hard to keep these good virtues in mind, when in one night a group of those measly little brown slugs can completely demolish a bed of plants without blinking an eye. Can slugs blink? I have NO Idea!

Thing is, there is more than one kind of slug. We have the large banana slug, which is native to the Northwest and actually eats mostly dried and rotten debris. I still prefer that they are not in my garden, mind you, but I do try not to kill them, preferring to move them to the forest. I figure, if I move them a few miles away, at the rate their glide, I won't have to worry about THAT one for a good ten years!

and... The UGLY!

The omnivorous Brown Slugs are the ones which we need to remove from the face of the earth! Okay, sorry so drastic, but these are transplants, non-native, that were brought in, not sure if it was deliberate, or by accident, and will eat anything in their path. These MUST die!

Controlling Slugs Naturally

Best method is to make your garden inhospitable.

- Clean-up all rotting and dead debris and remove all boards and other objects that slugs can climb under, unless you want to keep the boards so you can draw them into hiding to pick them out to do away with.

Natural Elimination: Increase Slug Predators and Parasites.

Birds: Get a bird bath and don't feed your birds too well! If do feed the birds, drop the seeds on the ground where the slugs are. The thought/hope is, given a seed or a slug laying close-by, the birds will choose the slug!

Chickens and Ducks LOVE slugs! The problem is, they also love your plants, so you'll need to plan carefully where and how to put them in your garden. You can actually get small coups that are large enough to hold one or two chickens, but are movable. They can eat through the bottom, no problem, but can't get to your plants. You just move them from one area to the other to get the slugs.

Other Slugs: I read recently that the Leopard slug, that large grey one with black spots is a known predator of other slugs, so encourage him to stay!

Beetles and Other Bugs: many are fond of the slugs, so if the bug isn't doing something worse to your plant, leave it be. It may be a slug eater!

Go SLUG HUNTING

Nighttime Hunt: Armed with ziplock, tongs or needlenosed pliers, and flashlight, go out at night, which is their favorite eating time and capture them! I offer prizes for the grandchild that comes back with the heaviest bag full! After your bag is full, mash all the air out to kill, or pour salt water in it. Salt destroys them, but remember it is bad on your plants.

Slug Baiting: Beer is a popular bait for slugs. Dig a hole, place a container in it with beer deep enough that they will fall in and can't get out. It should have a cover over it that keeps rain out but is big enough for slugs to climb in-this can be a slice of bark or a large leaf. The next morning, dispose of them.

Change The Environment

There are also things in our environment that makes a location unfriendly or uncomfortable to slugs. Just as you hate to walk across a bed of nails, they have trouble moving on rough surfaces since they use their slime to glide

- **Crushed Glass and Egg Shells:** both can be used as barriers to plants, glass is more effective and easier to get. Keep in mind that the band of glass or eggshells has to be at least 5 inches wide and you need to make sure that there are not any leaves or branches that lean over the barrier or they will crawl over and drop into your garden area. Yes, they are sneaky little devils!
- **Lime or Ashes:** A ring of lime or ashes around your plants can also create a barrier, making it difficult for slugs to move across the ground. Diatomaceous earth can also be used and works similarly.
- **Copper Barriers:** A 5 inch bank of copper tacked onto the bed can serve the same purpose. Copper creates a chemical reaction with their slime (burns them), keeping them off your plants.

Other Solutions:

- **Some gardeners on the coast use sprays made of ammonia or vinegar** as they will kill slugs, but must be sprayed carefully and is time-consuming as each slug must be sprayed individually. The question should be asked, if I can reach it to spray it, isn't it as easy to pick it up...
- **There are several marketed products that claim to be safe** on the environment, such as iron phosphate, but, use sparingly and follow all directions carefully. And, you might ask yourself if there's not other options that can be found before using them.

So, in summary, I agree, Slugs are BAD for our cultivated gardens, both veggie and flowers, but the fact is there is a place for slugs in our environment. The main goal should not be total eradication, but rather, total consideration. Learn the difference between the good and the bad and either learn to live with the good ones or move them to a forest where they can do their good work.

For each there is a purpose. Go have a Slug Race!

Slugs, The Good-The Bad and The Ugly



Slug Eggs



Slug Damage



Bananna Slug-Good Guys!



Slug Motion



Brown Slugs-The Very Very Bad!