

PEST CONTROL DEPARTMENT

SLUGS and SNAILS

GENERAL INFORMATION

Slugs and snails feed on a variety of living plants as well as on decaying plant matter, chewing irregular holes on the leaves of plants. There are around thirty species of slugs in Britain. Slugs and snails move by means of a muscular "foot" which secrete mucus along which the animal glides.

This mucus later dries to form the silvery "slime trail" that confirms the presence of the animal. Snails lay approx. 80 eggs (which are spherical and white in appearance) into holes or harborages in topsoil. It takes about 2 years for snails to mature.

They are most active at night and during cloudy or rainy days. On sunny days both species seek hiding places away from the heat of the sun. During hot, dry periods, snails seal themselves off from the external environment by a membrane and often attach themselves to tree trunks, fences, or walls. During cold weather slugs and snails hibernate in the topsoil. Slugs and snails are a nuisance pest only and pose no threat to public health.

Eliminate, as far as practicable, all places where snails or slugs can hide during the day. Stones, debris, vegetation growing close to the ground, giving dense ground cover make ideal harborages.

Reducing hiding places allows fewer snails and slugs to survive.

Control can also be achieved by handpicking slugs and snails.

Watering the infested area of the garden in the late afternoon helps to draw out slugs and snails. This, together with the searching of the area at dusk (aided if necessary by a torch) and physically removing them into a plastic bag for disposal is a very effective form of control if carried out on a regular basis.

Snails and slugs can be trapped under boards or flowerpots positioned throughout the garden. Beer-baited traps are effective although their range is confined to only a few feet. Barriers comprising of sand, ashes, broken eggshells and soot are physically difficult for slugs to cross by being either too sharp or by drying up the mucous glands that are necessary for their movement.

Slug pellets containing Metaldehyde are a useful form of chemical control usually affecting slugs and snails either by direct contact via the skin or when eaten.

Metaldehyde is an irritant that causes the slug to produce masses of mucus, leading to dehydration of the animal and sometimes death. If, during the treatment period there is rain, or even heavy dew, slugs can rehydrate and make a full recovery. It is important to remove all poisoned slugs and snails as soon as possible to prevent the possibility of secondary poisoning by non-target animals such as birds which may subsequently eat the poisoned animals.

PUBLIC INFORMATION SHEET No9

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