

SLUGS AND SNAILS

Slugs and snails, also called Gastropods, belong to the animal group called mollusks (Mollusca). They can be a nuisance around home and garden and they may cause extensive damage to growing plants especially in wet years.

The common species of slugs and snails found around the home are: the true garden slug (*Deroceras agrestis*); the tawny garden slug (*Limax flavus*); the spotted garden snail (*Helix aspersa*); and the cellar or greenhouse snails of the genus *Oxychilus*. All snails have shells, slugs do not.

Slugs and snails are mainly nocturnal, but they often come out of hiding in the evening or on dark cloudy days. Favorite hiding places are under decaying boards and logs, under board walks, steps or porches, in cellars, in rock piles, or under damp refuse. Snails are not as particular as slugs about damp dark places since they can seal up their shells when conditions are unfavorable.

Few slugs survive the winter out-of-doors in our area, but they are able to survive in drain pipes, cellars, greenhouses, storage pits and in well walls. It is reported that they perish quickly when exposed to below-freezing temperatures. Snails are more hardy, e.g., the greenhouse snail species have been able to survive the winter out-of-doors beneath trash piles as far north as Washington, DC.

Slugs lay their eggs from spring to fall in masses of 25 or more beneath boards, trash, flower pots, stones, and other moist places. The incubation period is 28 days at temperatures of 60°-70°F for slugs to become fully-grown may take a year.

Snails deposit from 10 to 100 eggs in a one-inch cavity in the soil prepared by the parent snail. The average incubation period is 10 to 20 days. From one to three years may be required for them to attain full-size.

In the early spring, as soon as temperatures are consistently above 40°F, surviving slugs and snails begin to move about, hatch, feed and lay eggs. Soon after emerging from the eggs, the young slugs and snails begin to move around and search for food. Food consists of any material that might be near at hand since they do not wander far. They remain for four or five weeks in a colony near the place where the eggs were deposited. The homing instinct is well-developed in slugs with each individual returning to its particular hiding place night after night, unless disturbed or unless the place becomes too dry. The route taken in returning is usually the same as taken in going-out. Slugs and snails will, if possible, avoid all dry and dusty areas or sharp objects as these exhaust and kill them due to the need for excessive slime secretion. Hence, you can discharge their movement by placing borders of gritty materials around the garden beds.