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# Outsmarting Vampire Slugs

Dennis Hinkamp  
*Utah State University*

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## GARDEN NOTES

# OUTSMARTING VAMPIRE SLUGS

*By Dennis Hinkamp*

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Slugs and snails are the vampires of the garden, sneaking in after dark and biting the necks of your plants and vegetables. During the day they remain safely hidden in dark places.

This nocturnal behavior gives them the advantage, says Jerry Goodspeed, Utah State University Extension horticulturist. Many people don't even know these slimy guests have been dining on their healthy plants because they never see them. However, slugs and snails have a couple of faults that can contribute to their demise.

Their first weak spot is their dislike of Utah's heat and low humidity, Goodspeed says. They prefer cool, moist areas and we sometimes unwittingly create this for them by overwatering. This is especially true in shady locations. We have a tendency to water everything for the same amount of time, which means shady locations receive as much water as hot and sunny ones. However, shady locations lose less water through evaporation and transpiration, remain damp and thus create a safe haven for these slimy pests. Reduce the amount of water in shady areas, and allow them time to dry out before watering again.

Another weakness snails and slugs have is their inability to travel great distances, he says. This means that if they do not have a good place to hide during the day, they are less likely to survive or at least stick around. Eliminate all possible refuge sites near or around plants. This includes wood piles, weedy areas, leaf piles, boxes, wood structures and other temporary snail vampire lairs.

Another trick is trapping them, Goodspeed says. Fortunately, these crawling pests are not too smart. They can be trapped using something as simple as a piece of wood or a flower pot strategically placed in the garden or flower bed. Check under the wood and pots every couple of mornings to see if any of these gooey fiends have picked that spot to spend the day. If they have, simply evict them from your property, or dump them into a garbage can, whichever seems appropriate.

Some people have successfully trapped them in a plastic bottle or another type of container in the ground, he adds. All this kind of trap requires is something fermented (such as beer) in the bottom, and a way for them to get in. Slugs will enter the container and get stuck inside until you come along and escort them into the garbage can.

There are also some barriers that seem to work quite well, Goodspeed says. Slugs and snails struggle crossing certain materials. A copper barrier around a garden or flower bed will keep the pests out because apparently the copper reacts with these critter's slime, causing an electrical reaction. It gives them a little jolt as they try to cross into the garden. However, many people don't like the looks of the copper barrier around their flowers.

Another barrier can be made with diatomaceous earth (ground up fossilized shells). However, this method can look even more disgusting than the copper. The earth must be piled about one inch high and three inches wide to really be effective. The diatomaceous earth cuts the bottom of these slippery pests as they crawl across it. This type of barrier needs to be reapplied regularly to remain effective.

There are also some natural enemies to slugs and snails, he says. However, most of them create more of a problem than they solve. Ducks, geese and chickens will eat slugs and snails, but the mess they leave behind, and the noise they make is usually not worth the trouble.

There are commercially made slug and snail baits, but their toxicity to pets and children make them a less popular choice, Goodspeed says. If they are used properly, they can be helpful in your slug and snail control program

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