

It's time to talk about slugs. Repeat after me, "We really can live peaceable with slimy slugs." Slugs are on the move again. I've just finished reading "The Western Society of Malacologists Field Guide to the Slug" by David George Gordon, published by Sasquatch Books, 1994. I bought my copy for \$6.95 at Liberty Bay Books in Poulsbo. Gordon tells us, "You will never be able to eliminate all of the slugs in your garden—as proved by one English zoologist who systematically removed 400 slugs from a quarter-acre garden each night for several years without any observable effect on the population."

Slugs live from one to six years. Their eggs are less than one-fourth inch in diameter (they look like fertilizer beads). The eggs are laid in clutches of 3 to 50 with some species laying as many as 500 eggs per year. A slug's mouth has a tongue like organ called a radula covered with as many as 27,000 teeth. Our slimy friends are mollusks and distantly related to oysters and squid. Slugs moved onto land and developed a lung. The hole on their right side functions like a nose bringing in air.

Slime absorbs water, keeping the slugs moist. Log on to fivash.com/departments/wa_101.html for more slug facts. The site says "Water absorbency is why you can't wash slime off your hands; you have to rub it off, as you would rubber cement." Fivash also says slime probably has a scent that helps slugs find other slugs. The slime of our native Banana slugs actually acts as a nitrogen rich fertilizer for our forest floor. Fivash facts come from Alice Bryant Harper's book called "The Banana Slug" by Bay Leaves Press, 1988. Her book can be ordered by calling 800-775-0817.

Conscientious gardeners are avoiding baits with Metaldehyde which can lead to nervous system damage or death in humans and other animals. Slugs feeding on Metaldehyde become dehydrated but they can and do rehydrate when it rains so you're not really killing them. Metaldehyde is found in Deadline, GoWest and other baits. Read every bit of the label including the cautions and hazards section before deciding to purchase these baits.

Much more satisfactory is the slice and dice method which instantly kills the slugs. Go out early in the morning and evening and look for slugs. Then slice and dice, using a knife or scissors. Slug family members will come and cannibalize the carcasses (eeeewwww). You can also strategically place flower pots turned upside down around your choice plants. Early morning and evening upend the pots, harvest the slugs and dump the slugs in soapy water to melt (eeeewwww again).

Please don't use salt to kill slugs. There are too many slugs for this method to be useful. An abundance of salt is not good for your plants. I took a class once from a biologist and she described vividly what happens to slugs when they are being dehydrated and destroyed by salt. It was not a pleasant image and I've never salted a slug again.

A new method of slug abatement is iron phosphate, commercially sold as "Worry Free" and "Sluggo." It is bait, but is considered organic and won't harm pets, birds or wildlife. Slugs eat the bait, become anorexic and quit eating. The slugs die in their hiding places so you don't come upon their shriveled emaciated bodies either. Sluggo and Worry Free will also indirectly nourish your plants. Iron phosphate is found in fertilizers. I used Sluggo around my oriental lilies and flag iris last year and am trying Worry Free this year. Everything else in my garden is abundant enough for the slugs and me to share.

One of the best ways to reduce slug damage is to reduce their hiding places. Cut back all overgrown grassy and weedy areas near your vegetable or flower gardens. Pick up and compost all rotting garden debris. Plant vegetation that slugs avoid. Slugs usually avoid prickly and thick leaved plants. Plant extras of your favorite plants and vegetables so you can share with your slugs. Send a self-addressed stamped envelope marked "slugs" to me at the North Kitsap County Herald, PO Box 278, Poulsbo WA 98370 and I'll send you a list of plants that slugs usually avoid. Remember that we're all part of the web of life and we all have a purpose, even slugs.

Want to become a compost expert and resource for your community? Here's your chance. The Master Gardeners are accepting applications for the 2000 Master Composter class. You'll learn about grasscycling, manures, soil food webs and aerobically brewed compost. Call the WSU Extension Office to sign up at 360-337-7157. Applicants must be able to attend classes on May 16, 18, 23, 25, 30 and June 1 from 7-9 PM and two

half-day field trips on May 20 and 27. You don't have to be a Master Gardener to become a Master Composter. Call the Extension Office and volunteer. It's an excellent opportunity.