

Repeat after me, “We really can live peaceably with slimy slugs.” Slugs are sliding around the gardens again. I’ve just finished reading “The Western Society of Malacologists Field Guide to the Slug” by David George Gordon, published by Sasquatch Books. I bought my copy for \$6.95 at Liberty Bay Books in Poulsbo. Gordon says, “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 and resemble fertilizer beads. Eggs are laid in clutches of 3 to 50; some species lay as many as 500 eggs per year. A slug’s mouth has a tongue like organ called a radula covered with up to 27,000 teeth. Our slimy friends are mollusks distantly related to oysters and squid. Slugs moved onto land, developing a lung. The hole on their right side functions like a nose bringing in air.

Slime absorbs water, keeping slugs moist. Log on to [fivash.com/departments/wa\\_101.html](http://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. Slime probably has a scent that helps slugs find other slugs.” Slime of our native Banana slugs acts as a nitrogen rich fertilizer. Fivash facts come from Alice Bryant Harper’s book called “The Banana Slug” by Bay Leaves Press. Locally, find “Rainy Day Slug,” a children’s book by Port Orchard writer Mary Palenick Colborn and illustrated by Sumner resident Lorie Ann Grover. “Rainy Day Slug” is a delightful story about a Banana Slug, published by Sasquatch. You can find the book and meet Mary Colborn at many of our local bookstores this month.

Conscientious gardeners avoid 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.

More satisfying is the slice and dice method, instantly executing slugs. Go out early in the morning and evening to find slugs. Slice and dice, using a knife, clippers 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 slug specialist who vividly described what happens to slugs when they are being destroyed by salt. It was definitely not a pleasant image.

A new method of slug abatement is iron phosphate, commercially sold as “Worry Free” and “Sluggo.” It’s a bait, 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 see their shriveled bodies. The iron phosphate in Sluggo and Worry Free will also nourish your plants. I’ve used iron phosphate around my oriental lilies and flag iris but have decided that everything else in my garden is abundant enough to share.

One way to reduce slug damage is eliminating slug 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 extra flowers and vegetables so you’ll have some left to enjoy. 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 and what plants are especially attractive to our slimy friends. 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.

*Send questions or comments to Peg at [gardenmentor@yahoo.com](mailto:gardenmentor@yahoo.com) or in care of this newspaper.*