

## Do Slugs Eat Daffodils?

By Susan Camp

At a recent meeting of local daffodil lovers, I overheard my friend, Tammie, telling other members about a slug attack on a daffodil grower's plants. I joined the conversation, and the discussion soon turned to methods of ridding daffodil beds of slugs and snails.

Later, at home, I remembered that I had written a column several years ago about a slug attack on our Asian and Oriental lilies. Although Jim and I haven't noticed a slug problem with our daffodils, an online search revealed that slug attacks can cause serious damage to valuable bulbs, so here is some information on how to protect your daffodils and other plants from these unwelcome critters.

Slugs are not insects. They are, essentially, snails without shells, so any information related to slugs and how to prevent them from eating your daffodils also applies to snails. Slugs and snails are members of the phylum Mollusca, like clams and oysters. Try not to think about this too much. Slugs' bodies consist mostly of water, and they are prone to drying out, which is why they hide during the day and feed at night. Slugs appear more frequently during periods of humid or rainy weather.

The bodies of slugs secrete mucus, which decreases friction and helps them navigate over rough ground. The mucus forms slimy trails on plants and walkways. Garden slugs are gray to dark brown and range in length from about ¼ to 2 inches. Their eyestalks, or tentacles, contain organs of sight and hearing.

Slugs don't trample nearby plants and they don't leave droppings in the garden. They can climb to eat what they want and they are voracious feeders. The only tell-tale evidence of a slug is a slime trail.

According to several online articles, slugs like to eat daffodil bulbs and other plant parts, especially young, newly planted ones. They will eat seedlings and mature plants with their rasp-like mouthparts, leaving irregular holes in leaves, buds, and flowers.

The best technique for decreasing damage caused by slugs is prevention, so quick recognition of plant damage is essential.

Slugs lay their eggs in soil, compost, or garden debris where they hatch in spring, so removing piles of old leaves and mulch will dispose of some eggs. Large wood chips and thickly-layered mulch make good hiding places for juvenile and adult slugs. If you suspect slugs are eating your plants, dig a hole 4 inches wide and 6 inches deep. Cover the hole with a board, and check for slugs after three or four days.

Avoid overwatering flower and vegetable gardens. Morning irrigation allows plants to dry before nightfall. Some plants, like daffodils, lilies, and irises are favorite snacks of slugs and snails. Tomatoes, cabbage, lettuce, beans, and strawberries also are susceptible to slug and snail damage. Phlox, daylilies, and members of the mint family are resistant to the mollusks.

You can remove slugs from leaves when you spot them, or ask someone else to do it if you are squeamish. Trap slugs under layers of damp newspaper or wood, and dispose of them in the morning. A container of beer, a mixture of yeast, molasses, cornmeal and flour, or a dish of soapy water may entice slugs to a watery demise. Isopropyl (rubbing) alcohol, grain alcohol, and ammonia also are fatal to slugs.

Copper ions give slugs a mild electrical shock, making copper strips or tape an effective barrier. Some gardeners try diatomaceous earth, which is abrasive to the slug's body, but this method is effective only in dry weather.

Commercial slug and snail bait contains copper silicate or copper sulfate in a spray, or metal aldehyde or iron phosphate in granular form. As with all pesticides, follow package directions.

Frogs, toads, snakes, songbirds, and ground beetles all prey on slugs, so encourage them to visit your garden. If you have chickens or ducks, let them forage in the beds. You will receive fresh eggs in return!