

ORCHID PESTES: SLUGS AND SNAILS

After receiving many pleas from growers for help with snails and slugs devouring their beautiful flowers and flower spikes, I decided to share with you the experiences and ways I have been fighting these nasty creatures of the night!

The dreaded snail, typically the brown garden snail and the field slug are a nightmare every orchid grower wishes would go away.

These slimy creatures come out at night and totally destroy new growth like that new tender flower spike on your favorite orchid.!

I will have to admit that snails and slugs cause 98% of the damage to my orchids. I am just devastated when I see a slimy film all over a plant and the new flower spike I have been waiting a full year for chewed right in half. Or when I see my prize *Cattleya* flower all slimy and shredded like it had been through a rough storm. There is no mistaking the signs of a snail or slug attack.

Snails, after insects, they are largest class in the animal kingdom.

All of these critters prowl by night eating everything in their site and then hide by day digesting their ill gotten gain! The slugs and the tiny snails crawl inside the pot moving through the loose medium making their daytime hideout at the bottom of the pot where you will never see them. They hide so well in the potting medium that you can look and look but never find them until you re-pot. Then you are surprised when you find them lurking in the bottom of the pot!

Controlling the seemingly endless hoard of snails and slugs is a continuing battle. I have yet to totally eradicate them from my garden and I still have them crawling around, but not as bad as in the past. Here are the best methods I have found to combat these slimy critters.

You can lure them to bait and destroy them.

Beer I think most of us have tried this one and it is the favorite with the men... OK, this could be an opening but I won't go there... The method works best if you place the beer in a container just deep enough for the snails and slugs to drown in. Empty the container of dispatched critters every few days and replace with fresh beer for another go around.

Yeast What, no beer? No problem. Mix a packet of **yeast** in a cup of water and place this mixture in your bowl.

Fruit Cut citrus fruit such as lemons, oranges or grapefruit in half and place the halves cut side down on the ground. Leave your "offering" overnight where the critters can find them. In the morning, toss the fruit and the attracted snails you will find under the fruit into the garbage or put them where the birds can have breakfast.

Potato Some slugs like potato. Take a big potato, cut it into two halves and place the pieces in suitable places, with the freshly cut surface downwards. In the morning collect the potato and critters for disposal. This "half potato method" is also good to bait several unwanted insects - try it!

Dog food Do you have a pet dog? If so, try dampened dry **dog food**. Place the food under a propped-up tin. Each morning, catch the snails hiding under the tin and destroy them or feed them to the birds.

Other non-toxic baits you can try include **peanut butte**, **bran** sugar, celery sticks, and grated carrots

Hunt them down one by one:

Salt The bane of all snails and slugs. Go on a "slug hunt" armed with a flashlight and salt shaker. When you spot a critter, sprinkle them with the salt and watch the beast instantly dissolve! Although this method may be very entertaining to some people providing literally hours of amusement, it will have relatively little impact on the overall snail/slug population.

Warning! Salt is also the bane to all orchids!! Do not shake salt on your plants or inside the pot on the medium! Be careful.

Fight fire with fire The critters eat your plants, so it's fair to use critters that will eat them first! Natural predators is a good solution in some places. Ducks, chickens, or other poultry are great if you have a place to keep them in your yard.

If you live where there are possums, they love snails and will keep your yard clean if you allow them to visit and have lunch.