

Safely Secure Your Garden Against Slugs: Beachcomber article February 2016

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*When I slip, just lightly, in the dark,
I know it isn't a wet leaf,
But you, loose toe from the old life,
The cold slime come into being,
A fat, five-inch appendage
Creeping slowly over the wet grass,
Eating the heart out of my garden.*

Theodore Roethke, *Words for the Wind*

Last year at this time our garden was inundated with slugs: black, gray, and beautiful banana slugs. Not wanting to use pesticides, my husband Michael Laurie and I thought we could take care of the problem with a bit of hand picking. We went out in the evenings, and found quite a few. He squished his. I gave the invasive grey and black ones to the neighbor's ducks, and relocated the native banana slugs far, far away (for them) in the forest near our house.

We didn't seem to be making a dent in our slug population, though. At the Farmer's Market, I started referring to the replacement seedling packs we bought as 'slug food'. Especially the cilantro. I started putting the seedling packs way up on top of our 200 gallon rainwater tank until I could plant them. Surely, I reasoned, they would never climb the five feet to the top of the tank. It took them about a week to find them up there, but they did.

I recalled the interviews I had done with local farmers and gardeners in late 2014 about their own ways of dealing with garden pests, including slugs. I went back to review their guidance. Karen Dale, author of [Garden On, Vashon!](#) used beer traps and copper strips, and was not convinced that Sluggo® worked. As she said: "I have been using it for the last couple of years, and have seen the slugs increase." Michelle Crawford of Pacific Potager hand picked them in the evening, when she was harvesting in the morning. She told me: "I used to pay my kids a penny a slug. They could find 50 pretty quickly." What a great idea. Too bad I didn't have any kids to recruit. Joe Yarkin of Sun Island Farm, ever creative, tried eating them like expensive escargot: "They didn't taste that great." I wanted to especially share that tip in case any of you were wondering. Nancy Lewis Williams also shared great information: "I have sandy soil, and the slugs don't like to cross it. I also advise spreading out your plants so there is not crowding. Keep grass mowed around the garden. In winter, I let chickens into the vegetable garden to turn it over and ducks to pick away at the slug eggs." Ken Miller, local biochar guru, used cinder blocks for the walls of his raised beds. As he put it: "The slugs don't like rough surfaces." Rob Peterson at Plum Forest Farm used beer traps. Here is how you make them. You simply put out dishes of beer in your garden. Use a container with a steep enough slope that the slugs can't just take a sip and slither on, they

fall in and can't get out again. Cheap and stale beer is just fine for them. Slugs are not snooty beer drinkers. And, surprisingly, they are even more attracted to the beer after a few slugs are dead in the beer. Go figure.

Those were all very helpful ideas. The one I liked best was the copper strips. Apparently slugs won't cross copper. They receive a mild electrical shock when they touch it. That sounded like the most humane approach to me. We cleaned out Ace and Island Lumber's stock of Correy's slug tape, and put it around all our raised beds and half wine barrels. Though the tape is sticky on one side, we made sure it would stay by stapling it at regular intervals. I also fashioned single-plant slug protectors. I raided the recycling bin for appropriate sized plastic containers, cut them up, and made plant collars out of them. A ring of copper tape went around each one. Putting up the copper tape and making the protective collars was a lot of work, but it saved our plants. The slug damage dropped considerably. The other good thing was that it was a permanent fix. The tape stayed on the raised beds, and the plant collars could be reused for several seasons.

Later in the spring, shortly after we cut down a large patch of nettles near the garden, we were infested with slugs. They must have been living happily in the nettles, and when we removed their food source, they took their revenge on our vegetable garden. An intense hunting effort began, and in one day, we picked over 170 slugs out of the garden. The neighbor's ducks enjoyed the feast, and we enjoyed the duck eggs the neighbor gave us. Happy gardening!