SLUG AND SNAIL CONTROL

Slugs and snails occasionally cause serious damage to seedlings, tender, low-growing leafy vegetables; or ripening fruit that are on the ground. Feeding damage, hollowed-out areas, can be found anywhere on fruit, but is usually concentrated near the stem. Slugs leave a telltale slime trail (silvery trail) behind on the surface of fruit or leaves. Slugs and snails are active at night or cloudy days.

Slugs and snails favor continuously moist soil and organic mulch. Their eggs are laid in groups in moist soil, and they use the organic mulch to overwinter. Slugs can complete their entire life cycle in a field.

If slugs are a problem, their hiding places, i.e., boards, stones, weedy areas, should be eliminated. Heavy mulching will also create a favorable habitat for slugs and should be thinned so the soil can become warm and dry. This will reduce the number of slugs. Raised beds that can dry out more readily than flat beds reduce slug problems. Use of black plastic mulch will discourage slug build-up because it causes the soil to heat up and dry out.

As a last resort, metaldehyde bait (Clean Crop, 3.5G 30-40 lb./A or 7.5 G 15-20 lb./A) can be used and is usually very effective. Follow label instructions carefully for application methods for each particular vegetable crop. Apply bait in evening after a rain or irrigation. For an organic alternative, diatomaceous earth can be spread around plants (a 1 inch high x 3 inch wide band). Control of slugs with diatomaceous earth has been poor to fair.