

Snails & Slugs



Wildlife-friendly control methods

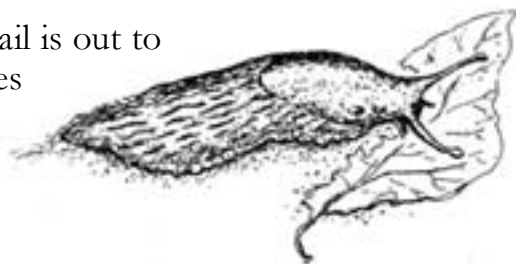
Slugs and snails can wreak havoc in the garden, munching through flowers, seedlings and vegetable crops. But do not despair, there are effective means of controlling them that do not harm wildlife or pets.

Slug pellets

Slug pellets harm wildlife through a gradual build-up of toxins in hedgehogs, frogs, song thrushes and other predators as they eat their way through the poisoned slugs and snails. Pellets are sometimes labelled 'wildlife-friendly', but don't be taken in – many of these are also hazardous. The wildlife-conscious gardener should try to avoid using slug pellets altogether.

Harmless slugs

While it may seem every slug and snail is out to get your treasured plants, most species actually live exclusively on dead and rotting material, toadstools, fallen leaves and invertebrates in the soil.



The villains

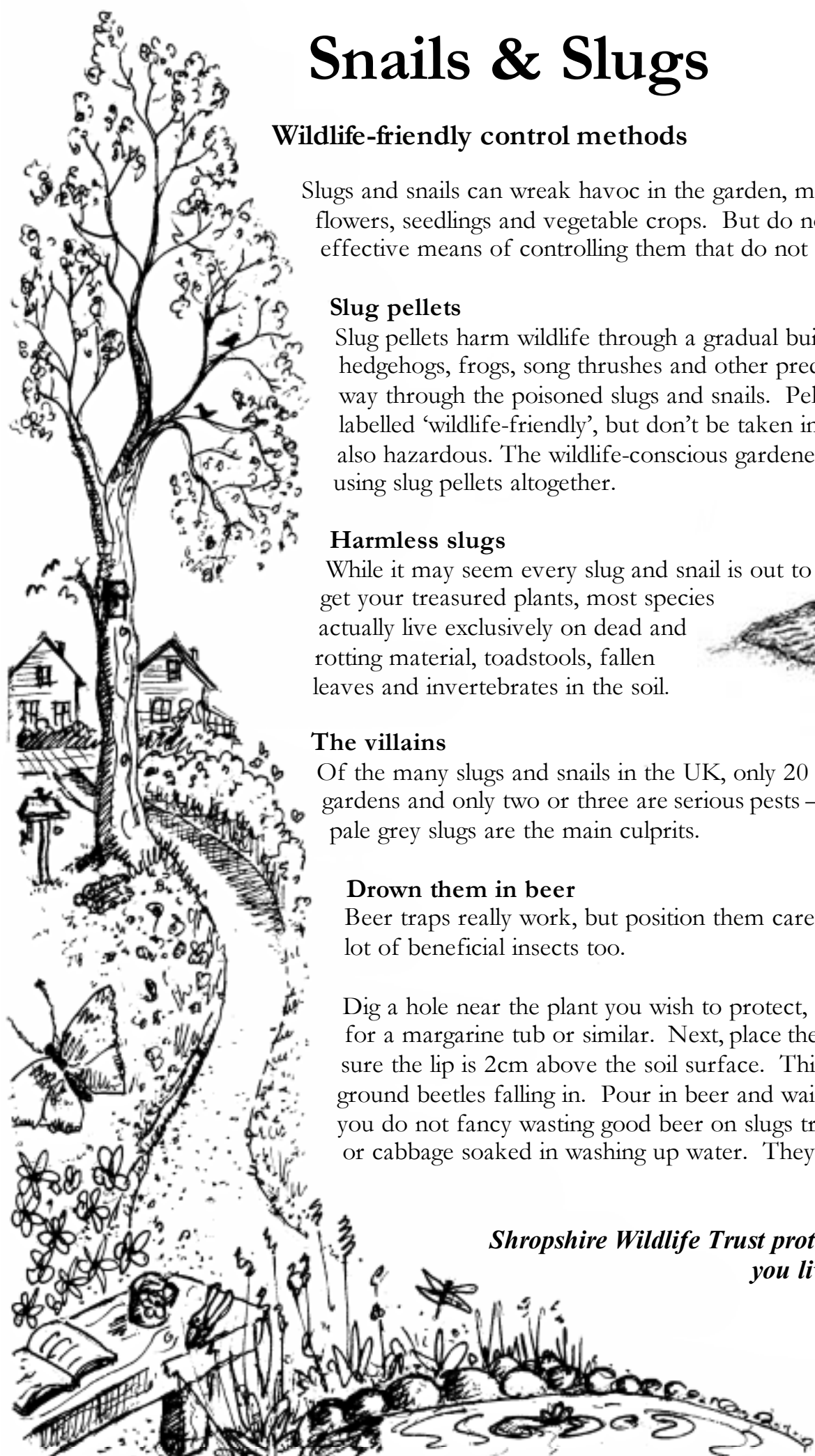
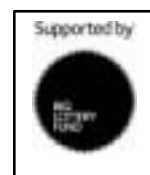
Of the many slugs and snails in the UK, only 20 are found in British gardens and only two or three are serious pests – garden snails and small pale grey slugs are the main culprits.

Drown them in beer

Beer traps really work, but position them carefully or you will catch a lot of beneficial insects too.

Dig a hole near the plant you wish to protect, making it big enough for a margarine tub or similar. Next, place the pot in the hole, making sure the lip is 2cm above the soil surface. This will prevent beneficial ground beetles falling in. Pour in beer and wait for the slugs. Or, if you do not fancy wasting good beer on slugs try milk, grapefruit juice or cabbage soaked in washing up water. They'll love it.

Shropshire Wildlife Trust protects wildlife where you live.

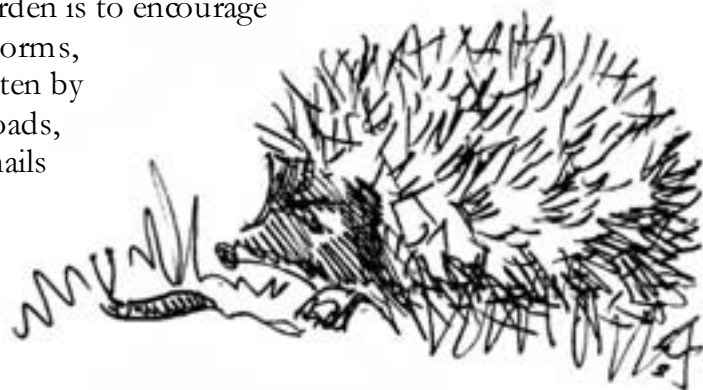


Pick them off by hand

This is one of the most effective methods. Go out after dark with a torch - damp nights are good - and wear rubber gloves if you don't fancy their slimy skin. You will be amazed how many slugs and snails you find. Dispose of them as you will (but not over the garden wall).

Natural predators

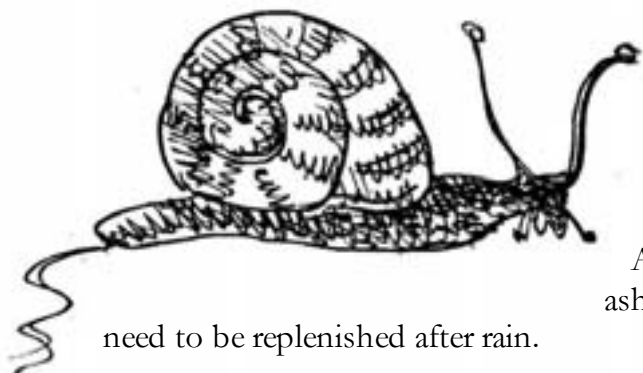
One of the best ways to control slugs and snails in the garden is to encourage their natural predators. Slugs are eaten by beetles, slow worms, hedgehogs, toads, birds and especially frogs. Snails are eaten by song thrushes, mistle thrushes, blackbirds, hedgehogs, toads, mice, centipedes and the larvae of glow worms. In fact snails are the exclusive diet of glow-worm larvae, so without snails they wouldn't exist. Song thrushes prefer large snails, cracking them open on stones, but mistle thrushes and blackbirds haven't yet mastered this trick - so they eat smaller snails with softer shells.



To encourage these natural predators in the garden, ensure there is a place for them to breed, shelter and hibernate. A pond is good for frogs and a log pile will encourage hedgehogs and lots of other useful creatures to stay.

Biological control

Parasitic nematode worms are an effective and safe biological control. They burrow into the mollusc and eat it from the inside. The packs of powder contain millions of microscopic nematodes that you simply water into the earth.



Barricades

A ring of sharp grit, crushed egg shells, pine needles or wood ash around a plant can help keep slugs and snails away. This will

need to be replenished after rain.

Bottle barriers

To protect young plants from late frosts as well as slugs and snails, remove the cap from a plastic drink bottle and cut off the bottom half. Place over the plant and remove during the day if you wish.

Pot plants

Place a strip of self-adhesive copper tape around the rim of the pot. The copper naturally emits a small electrical charge that deters both slugs and snails.

Watering

Don't give slugs the pleasure of nice wet soil around your plants just as they come out to feed. Water plants early in the morning instead.



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