

Opinion

Live Free and Dig with the Littleton Garden Club

Slug wars

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Littleton Garden Club

I'm peace-loving and generally kind to living creatures. That was before I considered "garden warfare" with slugs. Last fall, I purchased a dozen small, beautiful mums. The prospect of autumn color returning to my garden gave me cheer. That feeling remained until morning. Every mum just planted was devoured overnight by slugs.

Shiny hard threads

were visible on the stubble of what was once my Chrysanthemums. Slug damage was evident from the slime trail. That implicated them as the culprit over caterpillars or other insect pests.

I searched online for known organic solutions other than hand-picking.

Slugs represent a big challenge for gardeners across the country. They attack a wide range of herbaceous plants. As terrestrial mollusks, they're related to mus-

sels, oysters and clams. Due to lack of a shell they are at risk of drying out. That is the key to how to begin combat with them.

They hang out in wet areas feeding at night and avoid the sun's rays. During the day, they hide in garden mulch or at the base of plants.

My new routine includes watering primarily in the morning so as not to leave excess moisture for "the enemies" and removing any excess

mulch or rock features where slugs might hide.

In an effort to try non-toxic solutions, I tried diatomaceous earth (DE) to help control slugs. It needs to be applied to the soil around plants when it's dry.

Beer traps haven't worked for me in the past as frequent rains made them overflow and require refilling.

This year, I may try the grapefruit trick.

Empty grapefruit halves, open side down,

can be placed near plants that slugs are drawn to. In the morning a breakfast treat for birds may be offered in the fruity container!

Broken eggshells and coffee grounds are my main form of ammunition.

Sharp edges are not comfortable to slug bodies and they also are not coffee lovers!

Eggshells and grinds decompose and may benefit my soil and earthworms as well. So far, it slowed down the occurrence of damaged leaves and is easy to apply.

A fast and easy way to get rid of slugs for up to six weeks is with microscopic parasitic worms called nematodes. They are watered into the soil with a special bacterium that lives in symbiosis with the nematodes. This acts as food for them. Nematodes actively hunt out slug prey. Within three to

five days the slugs will swell and begin to die. This should be done in moderation as to not kill beneficial insects.

There are at least two possibilities of slugs that I am dealing with:

Limax maximus or Giant Garden Slug: This slug is fast and eats both plants and other slugs.

Arion rufus or European Black Slug: It attacks all garden plants.

I just want to see my autumn mums live to blossom this year.

My partner humorously suggested 'small micro landmines' as a solution. I'm sticking with organic methods instead. Hoping for a dryer growing season this year. Maybe my garden won't be a premier "slug picnic destination" any longer.

For more information about the club and our meetings, please visit www.littletongardenclub.org.