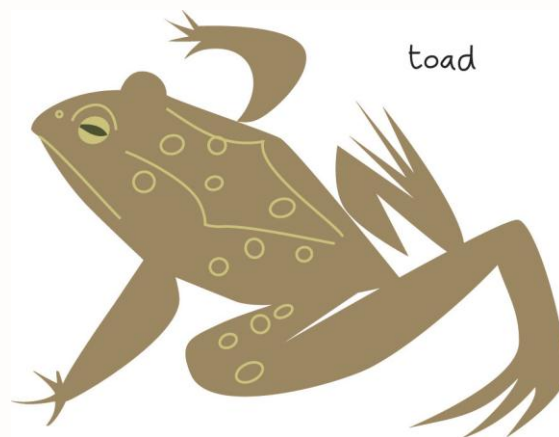


Wildlife Gardening: Pest control

Why are nest boxes important?

A damp spring is wonderful for slugs and snails and is great if you are into molluscs, but can be a real problem if you are trying to grow seedlings in a garden or have tender plants that molluscs regard as gourmet food. Too often these days we seek a quick fix in the garden and companies play on this by promising instant results if you buy their noxious chemicals. Do remember that taking time to achieve a balance in your garden will actually give you much better results, but may take a season to become effective. Also please remember that not all slugs and snails are bad. The garden snail probably does the most damage and they can easily be collected by hand and moved to a more suitable location. The following methods have all been shown to work in controlling the numbers of slugs and snails in domestic gardens:



Try to remove cover

Molluscs need damp areas to live in as they are unable to control water loss from their bodies. One of the reasons they are so slimy is that mucus helps to cut down evaporation. During the day they tend not to be active because of the risk of drying out and will instead hide in areas of long grass, under bricks or stones, under low-growing vegetation, amongst piles of plant pots and any other spot in your garden where they can keep out of the sun. Take time to look around your garden to identify the spots where they hide and remove their cover. In summer they will often emerge in daylight after a light shower of rain which is an excellent opportunity to discover where they are hiding.

Encourage their predators in your garden

A great many insects, mammals and birds feed on slugs, so if you can encourage these you will have a natural form of control working for you. Please do not use slug pellets as these will make your problem worse by killing your allies. Encourage ground beetles by leaving tussocks of grass in your lawn over winter so they can hibernate. Make sure you have an anvil in your garden for song thrushes to use to smash the snail's shell. A reasonable-sized stone or piece of brick will do. If you have room in your garden introduce a pond to encourage frogs and toads. Leave a dish of water at ground level for birds and hedgehogs to use when they dine on your unwanted molluscs.

Coconut shell halves

If you lay these on the ground they will attract slugs, either inside or under them, and they can then be disposed of.



Set a beer trap

Set a jam jar into the soil where slugs and snails are evident but leave the rim of the jar about an inch above the level of the soil. If you do not do this, you risk drowning slug-eating ground beetles. Put a small amount of beer into the jar or if you don't have beer, milk works too. Empty the jars once a week and refill them, especially if it rains. You can put the contents of the jam jar on your compost heap.

Change the surface around vulnerable plants

There are a number of substances that slugs and snails do not like crawling over and these can be laid around the base of plants to keep the molluscs off - a two-inch wide band of bran around the base of your vulnerable plants really works. Other substances include ash from fires and BBQs; crushed eggshell; sawdust; cocoa shell mulch; gravel; and lawn sand.

Plant out far more seedlings than you will need

This is not ideal but is one way to ensure that you have some vegetables left for human consumption at the end of the season!

Plant vegetables in containers

If possible plant tender vegetables into pots where you can use petroleum jelly around the edge of the pot to stop slugs and snails getting at your produce.

Purchase nematode worm preparations

These are commercially available and have the advantage that while they parasitise the slugs they do not affect any other species and do not harm predators when they are eaten.

Live and let live!

If all of this fails or the methods do not appeal why not get a book on terrestrial molluscs and learn all about them.

If you would like to **find out more** about how to encourage wildlife into your garden, please see the Wildlife Gardening pages of our website at <http://www.hiwwt.org.uk/wildlife-gardening>.

If you have a question about wildlife you may find in your garden please contact **WildLine**, the Trust's free **wildlife information service** on 01489 774406 or Email: wildline@hiwwt.org.uk

