

Unwanted guests: Spiders, slugs and snails



Photo by Wolfgang Hasselman

Even if a creature is small, it should still be treated compassionately. Animal sentience and the ability to feel pain is no longer seen as applying only to mammals, and as understanding grows this is likely to be extended further. In our interactions with creatures like spiders, slugs and snails we should treat them humanely and strive to avoid harm.

Whether in the home or garden, there are many things we can do to deter these small unwanted guests, or curb the damage they might do, without killing them or polluting the environment on which we all, animals and humans, depend.

Avoid using pesticides. Their effects can reach well beyond target species, harming wildlife¹ such as birds, bats, hedgehogs, frogs, toads, bees and other non-target insects. In the home they can pose a danger to pets.

Try to live alongside our small guests. Develop a greater tolerance for small unwanted guests. Zapping them with chemicals could do greater harm than any damage they may do. It's worth resisting the urge to immediately evict or banish them. Obviously, if you have a large number you will want to act. So, here we suggest some humane measures you can take...

Choose repellents, not killer sprays and substances. Many sprays and substances are formulated to kill particular 'problem' species. However, others focus on acting as a barrier instead. These should be applied at barrier points, never directly onto creatures. Check product information carefully to avoid killer sprays or substances, and ensure they are vegan-friendly and not animal-tested.

Ensure substances are safe and used with care. Some substances, including some essential oils and herbs, can be toxic to cats and dogs and other animals.² Check products for 'pet safety' assurances. Always ensure essential oils are diluted before use, as they can damage skin in concentrated form.

If you have an emergency or an infestation, contact an expert. See, for example, Humane Wildlife Solutions.³

Spiders

Spiders in your garden are a natural occurrence and should be tolerated. They are an important part of garden ecosystems, regulating insect numbers and being eaten by birds.

No matter what we do spiders like the house spider (*Tegenaria domestica*) will always turn up inside our homes occasionally, and we should probably try to tolerate them a bit more. Of course, this isn't so easy if you suffer from arachnophobia! But by taking some simple steps you can make your home a bit less attractive to spiders.

Spiders are attracted to dark places where they will hide. Avoid giving them this opportunity by decluttering and, where possible, **ensure you don't leave boxes on the floor.** Doing an **early 'autumn clean'**,



Photo by Krzysztof Niewolny

Spiders, slugs and snails advice sheet



are many **non-lethal spider catcher devices** on the market. These are hand-held devices designed to temporarily trap a spider for removal and release to another location. Read the manufacturers information and reviews before choosing a device to ensure it isn't likely to harm the spider. It is best to **avoid using spider vacuum catchers**. They use low-powered vacuum suction to trap spiders in a tube or chamber for relocation. Even devices which aren't intended to harm spiders, may accidentally do so.

Slugs and Snails

Slugs and snails are mostly encountered in gardens and other outdoor spaces. You are unlikely to get many indoors, but if you do, put them outside.

Never use slug pellets! As well as killing slugs and snails, they can poison hedgehogs, birds, frogs and toads. Hedgehogs are known to eat slug pellets and can also ingest the poison by eating affected slugs and snails, which are a big part of a hedgehog's diet. Pellets containing metaldehyde will be banned from outside use from 2022 to protect wildlife⁴. However, iron or ferric phosphate pellets will remain available, and these can be harmful to earthworms and pets, particularly dogs, as well as killing slugs and snails.

Snails are a natural feature of gardens and cannot be eradicated. But not all are equally interested in your plants, so take a close look at your garden snails to identify which you have. The common garden snail, *Cornu aspersum*, is the most likely to be found. Banded snails, *Cepaea* species, may also be numerous and are much less damaging to plants. These are smaller and often brightly banded yellow, white and brown.

Encourage wildlife into your garden. If you have birds, ground beetles, frogs, toads or hedgehogs in your garden they will feed on snails and slugs, keeping their numbers down.

Use physical barriers to stop snails reaching your plants. Evidence is variable, but rough or sharp textured mulches and substances thought to be distasteful or strong smelling tend to work.⁵

Install slug fences in your garden to protect your plants. These are usually made of galvanised steel and rust-proof, with plastic versions offering a cheaper option. Although sometimes expensive, they have been shown to be

both inside and outside your home, will also help.

Keep windows and external doors closed where possible, especially when you have lights on indoors. This will help keep out a wide range of insects, which should also mean spiders are less attracted to your home as a source of insect food. **Turn off outside lights as well, unless they are needed.**

If using a spray only use a 'natural' spider repellent.

These are designed to act as a natural barrier to deter spiders, not to harm them, and are usually formulated on plant oils and botanical extracts. They should be sprayed around doors, window frames or other spider entry points. Always seek a vegan formula that hasn't been animal-tested and is safe for pets, such as Ecozone.

You can make your own spider repellent. Spiders don't like citrus smells - such as lemon, lime, oranges, grapefruit - and peppermint, eucalyptus and tea-tree essential oils have all been cited as natural repellents. A diluted spray made of any of these natural repellents could be used around spider entry points.

If you find a spider indoors, don't remove it unless you feel you really have to. If you can't do it by hand, there

Spiders, slugs and snails advice sheet

effective physical barriers to slugs and snails.⁶

Use slug collars for individual plants.

These are plastic (sometimes metal) protective barriers designed to be placed around a single plant. They can be used in combination with cloches and Victorian bells to protect plants. DIY slug collars can be made from old plastic bottles.⁷

A wide range of natural materials can be used in the garden as barriers.

These are materials slugs and snails avoid crossing. Results may vary, so experiment with barriers using any of the following: aromatic herb leaves (such as sage), bark chippings, flour, horseradish, pine needles, mullein leaves, rooibos tea leaves (naturally caffeine-free), coarse sand and talcum powder. Caffeine can be fatal to slugs and snails,⁸ so we don't recommend using coffee grounds. Salt and garlic can also be fatal.



Photo by James Frid

Avoid using copper tape, which gives a static electric shock to slugs and snails, and may be toxic to them.

Water your garden in the morning, not the evening. This will reduce your garden's surface water at night, when slugs and snails emerge. Studies have shown this can reduce slug damage by 80 per cent.

Include sacrificial plants in your garden. This should work if you have space. Planting red clover, comfrey or lettuce will entice slugs away from other plants.

Grow plants that slugs and snails don't like to eat. Many flowering plants, such as lavender, penstemon, hardy geraniums and nasturtiums, are popular with pollinators but not slugs and snails. There are many vegetables and herbs that slugs and snails will not eat. Long lists of these can be found online and in gardening books. Most trees and shrubs are safe from snail attacks, including fruit and nut trees and berry bushes.⁹

If you need further help, then we would recommend a humane deterrence specialist company. We would recommend contacting **Humane Wildlife Solutions** - www.humanewildlifesolutions.co.uk - 07771 361226

1. Pesticide Action Network (PAN) UK www.pan-uk.org

2. PDSA has useful advice, including on plants toxic to pets (<https://www.pdsa.org.uk/taking-care-of-your-pet/looking-after-your-pet/all-pets/poisonous-plants>) and essential oils to avoid or use with care around cats (<https://www.pdsa.org.uk/taking-care-of-your-pet/looking-after-your-pet/kittens-cats/cats-and-essential-oils>).

3. <https://humanewildlifesolutions.co.uk/>

4. A planned UK ban on the sale of metaldehyde slug pellets was withdrawn by the government in 2019, following a High Court ruling.

5. Royal Horticultural Society webpage on slugs.

6. Snail and Slug Fence Field Test <https://www.slughelp.com/slug-fence-test-snail-fence-check>

7. DIY Slug Collars: how to make slug collars for free <https://beginnergardenertips.com/diy-slug-collar>

8. A study from June 2002 reported in the journal Nature found that slugs and snails are killed when sprayed with a caffeine solution, and that spraying plants with this solution prevents slugs from eating them.

9. Vegetables and Herbs Slugs Do Not Like, Plants Resistant to Slugs and Snails <https://www.slughelp.com/vegetables-herbs-slugs-not-like-plants-resistant-slugs-snails>;

20 Slug Proof Plants: <https://www.gardenersworld.com/how-to-grow-plants/20-slug-proof-plants>



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