

Gardening

- Alternative Pest Control

For the benefit of the environment we should try to use alternative pest control methods in our gardens rather than chemical pesticides.

For roses plagued by greenfly, a single clove of garlic planted beside each bush solves the problem without the need for chemical insecticides. The rose absorbs a substance from the garlic that aphids can't stand. This won't affect the rose's scent either and, as long as you don't allow the garlic to flower, there will be no garlic odour in your garden. Onions and chives also have the same effect.

If you have the time and inclination, aphids can also be simply wiped off the plant with a damp cloth. Alternatively, spraying with a weak mixture of washing-up liquid and water is also effective.



For fruit trees with whitefly or woolly aphid infestations, grow trailing nasturtiums under the tree and wind the long stems around the trunk.

However, the most effective and ecologically sound method of controlling the plant-wreckers is to encourage natural predators to your garden to actively hunt out and eat pests. If you grow a diversity of plant species you'll attract beneficial exterminators to help control problems. For example, ladybirds, lacewings and hoverflies relish an aphid meal and these can be attracted to your garden by planting marigolds.

There are 24 different species of slug in Britain and about half of these are in your garden causing havoc to your precious plants and seedlings. Slugs and snails are nocturnal and some people advocate going out into the garden at night in order to catch them by hand. The problem with this is what do you do with them once you've got them? A well-known slug catcher is a beer trap. One evening, just lay a jam jar containing a little beer on the ground and in the morning you will have a jar full of dead slugs. Once again though, disposal is not a particularly pleasant task.

Plants that are particularly susceptible to slug attack, like Hostas, can be protected by surrounding them



with a layer of grit or sharp gravel. The slugs soft bellies cannot tolerate the rough surface.

Slug pellets are very dangerous to all animals and birds. If a poisoned slug is eaten by a bird or hedgehog, these creatures will also die. A far better way to control the number of slugs and snails is to entice animals into your garden that eat these pests.

Predators to encourage are centipedes, ground beetles, frogs, toads, slow-worms, hedgehogs and birds. Put down pieces of wood or pots for the slugs to hide under, then in the daytime uncover them to expose the juicy morsels to birds.

To tempt hedgehogs into your garden leave out a dish of dog food which they love to eat – not bread and milk as this harms them. Once you have hedgehogs in your garden you want to keep them there, so provide them with a home. Often they will live in your compost heap which can cause problems when you come to use the compost. If possible, try and give them a hidden waterproof box filled with dried leaves or straw.

If you have a pond you will probably already have frogs living there that will feast happily on the slugs. Shyer toads may also be living in quiet, damp areas of your garden and you can encourage both amphibians to take up residence by providing them with places to hibernate in over winter. Log piles provide good shelters as do the base of hedges, compost heaps and under stones. The most effective biological method of controlling slugs is to buy nematodes which are microscopic parasites that occur naturally in the soil, but only in small numbers. Buying them (from mail order companies or some garden centres) increases the nematode population enormously and once their work is complete, the numbers decrease to normal levels. They are supplied in granules that you activate by mixing with water and watering your plants with the solution. The nematodes kill the slug underground so you don't have to dispose of the slimy remains. One application should last for six to eight weeks therefore treatment twice a year is sufficient for most gardens.

So, empty your shed of your aging bottles of poisons try some of these biological and natural pest controls instead.

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