MOLLUSCS - SLUGS AND SNAILS

Molluscs are essential and useful participants in the ecosystem, helping to clear rotten and diseased plantstuff, converting it into a form in which it can be reincorporated into the soil organic matter cycle. They are only usually an actual threat to young seedlings or soft maturing crops such as lettuces.

Activity dependant on;

- **Time of Year** synchronised to coincide with plant growth and decay phases
- Sudden **emergence** in May. Especially in late, wet spring and early summer
- **Day / Night Length** Active during dark (including cloudy / overcast)
- **Weather Patterns** Short and long term
- **Rainfall / Moisture / Dew** Aids travel: up to 10 metres a night
- **Habitat** Wild / Undisturbed areas (= protected breeding areas)
- **Snails** indicate the presence of abundant Calcium
- **Only slugs** would suggest the conditions are Acid

WHAT TO DO

1. CLEAR PATHS. Keeping paths weed-free creates a dry surface which is harder for molluscs to cross. Separates cultivated areas from wild vegetation.

2. PLANKS OF WOOD. Surround vulnerable crops with wooden planks which will create the cool, dark, moist conditions molluscs prefer. Check regularly, especially after rainfall and remove or squash.

3. COMPOST. Fully mature compost as a mulch. Well digested organic matter offers no food so molluscs will search elsewhere.

4. BEER TRAPS. Protect valuable crops by intoxicating your foe with diluted beer. Molluscs are attracted by sugar and alcohol dissolves them, leaving a foul-smelling mush. Set traps above soil level, so beetles don't fall in and drown. Cover container to stop rain washing it out.

Any trap becomes a home or hiding place if left for too long, more than a week.

Slugs prefer to digest dead and rotting matter, so you can use cleanings and clearings as a trap or decoy to lure molluscs away from precious living growth by leaving it on paths, then removing crop-waste and pests to the compost heap.

- **PLAN AHEAD** Reduce the population a month or two before a crop goes out.
- **PREDATORS** Encourage frogs, toads, hedgehogs and the blackbirds into area.
- **SITE LAYOUT** Design out the problem by creating a balanced ecosystem!
- **RESISTANT CROPS** Large seeds, established transplants and vegetatively-propagated crops such as onion / garlic / shallot / tubers (potato / artichoke)
- **DON'T** bother with salt or anything which will dissolve with the first rains (pellets).
- **BARRIERS** such as plastic bottles can be effective on a small scale, but can overheat, stressing young plants.

SLIME. Remove by rubbing your hands with fine, dry soil then washing off. Repeat two or three times.