

GRAY GARDEN SLUG *Mollusca Agriolimax reticulatum*

DESCRIPTION

Slugs are mollusks that lack an external shell as found in snails. The gray garden slug is about 6 to 8 mm long and varies in color from gray to black. They are covered with a slimy material that protects them from desiccation. Other species that may be important in specific areas are the **black greenhouse slug**, *Milax gagates*, the **large spotted garden slug**, *Limax maximus*, the **gray field slug**, *Agriolimax laevis*, the **reticulated slug**, *Prophysanion andersoni*, and the **European slug**, *Arion ater*.



Grey garden slug

Spotted garden slug



European brown slug

ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE

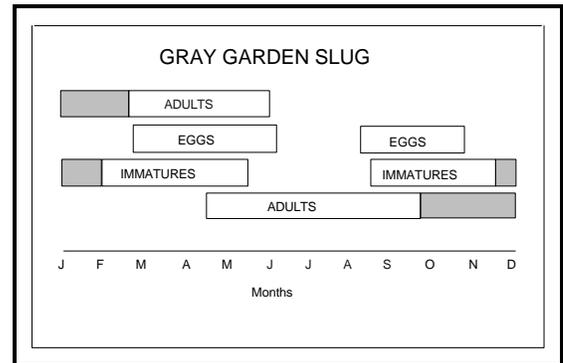
All stage of slugs, except the eggs, cause injury to plants, especially seedling vegetables, ornamentals forage crops, and newly established plantings of grass grown for seed. Slugs feed at night by rasping the tissues from the leaf surfaces, excluding the leaf veins. They can be associated with their injury by the trail of white shiny slime that they leave behind. Heavily damaged seedling usually die and older plants take on a ragged appearance.

DISTRIBUTION AND LIFE HISTORY

This species occurs in moist cool areas of the United States, particularly along coastal areas in the northeast, south, and Pacific Northwest. Slugs reproduce almost continuously during mild, moist weather. Each individual is bisexual and is capable of laying eggs. The eggs are yellowish-white and about 2 mm in diameter. They are laid singly or in groups under clods of dirt, under boards, in weedy areas, or trash. The eggs hatch in two to four weeks and the tiny slugs begin feeding immediately. Slugs lay eggs year around in cool moist conditions, but the majority are deposited in the late summer or fall after rains begin. These eggs hatch and the small slugs begin feeding, generally these slugs form the overwintering stage. However, if the eggs are laid in October or November they also may overwinter. The gray garden slug also will lay eggs in the early spring. Slugs develop slowly and most reach maturity in about a year.

MANAGEMENT AND CONTROL

The presence of slugs can be easily determined by placing a handful of slug bait under pieces of scrap wood or cardboard placed in the field or garden. This should be done after a rain in August or September.



If treatment is necessary, do so in the fall to reduce the population and the number of eggs that are laid to overwinter. Hand picking slugs from ornamental plants at night can reduce small infestations around homes, but is impractical in large plantings. Placing saucers filled with beer around the garden may reduce small populations, but may not be effective to control large infestations. The most commonly used control is baits impregnated with insecticides. Slug control using insecticides should be practiced year around. Baits should be applied in the fall just after rains begin to kill slugs before they lay eggs. Baiting delayed until late October or November may be too late to prevent an infestation the following spring.

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