

ask

the landscape professional

Linda K. Lillie of Sprigs & Twigs



Welcome to my weekly series!

Feel free to send me questions you'd like to have me answer and I will do my best to address the ones of most general interest.

Email or mail your questions to: info@sprigsandtwigs.net or Linda Lillie, Sprigs & Twigs Inc, PO Box 245, Gales Ferry, CT 06335

Question of the Week: *My Hostas have holes in the leaves, what's going on with them?*

Linda's Answer:

Looks like you have a slug problem; those shiny, slimy mollusks are a gardener's worst nightmare. Slugs are similar to snails but without the shell. They range in size from less than an inch long to longer than 4 inches. Slugs do their damage at night and hide in weedy borders of yards and fields during the day. They eat all types of vegetation and crops, but they especially like many varieties of Hostas, particularly those that have thin leaves. You will see the largest number of slugs and the most damage to your plants in August and September after a wet summer.

So, what can you do? First of all, do not use any chemicals. There are chemicals in stores that kill slugs, but they kill dogs too. Just because you can find them in the store, doesn't mean they are safe to you, your kids, the environment or your pets.

Here are things you can safely do:

1. Look for and eliminate daytime hiding spots for slugs like weedy edges of gardens,
2. Replace any large bark chip mulch or woodchips with shredded bark mulch. Slugs hide under the large chips but not the shredded bark mulch.
3. Remove Pachysandra, Myrtle or any other ground covers that create a warm, moist hiding place that the slugs can crawl under.
4. Slugs hate navigating over rough, dry surfaces. Surround your plant with inert rough materials: gravel, sand, wood ashes, crushed egg shells or even lime (although lime lowers the pH of the soil, which may be perfectly fine, it depends on your garden soil). Remember that the rain will tend to deplete whatever you use so it will need to be replaced.
5. Dump the morning coffee in the slug area. The USDA has recently reported that slugs are killed with a 2% caffeine solution and even weaker solutions cause them to stop eating.
6. Slugs love beer! Well, actually, they love the yeast in beer. A favorite slug remedy is to dig a dish into the ground so that the lip is even with the surface and fill it with beer or a solution of baker's yeast and water. Nearby slugs will come for a swim and drown! You will have to place a number of these beer traps around the area you want protected.

There are plenty of safe approaches to slug control, so when you see a flashy store display touting pesticides, walk right by, you know better!



Sprigs & Twigs

Linda K. Lillie is the President of Sprigs & Twigs, Inc, the premier landscape tree care & lawn care company in SE Connecticut for the last 17 years. She is a graduate of Connecticut College in Botany, a Connecticut Master Gardener and a national award winning landscape designer for her design and installation work.

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