

The Invasion of the Giant Slugs

The summer has been notable for (putting it politely) very damp conditions. This appears to have led to a proliferation of *Arion ater* – the Large Black Slug. This slug, which is usually between 10 and 15 cms in length (but has been recorded at up to 20 cms) has a prominent breathing hole on the side and it comes in almost any colour, as well as black. Red, orange, grey and beige are common, and the foot fringe is often of a paler and redder colour than the body.

On wet evenings our lawns have been decorated with large numbers of these slimy creatures. It is really difficult to walk without treading on one – and that is not a pleasant experience!

However, these impressive slugs pose no threat to the hostas and lettuces. While they may damage seedlings early in the season when there is not much else to eat, what they really like to munch is rotting things, such as vegetation and fruit, also fungi, manure and dead things (e.g. other slugs which you have trodden on).

Innocent though they may be, they are unfortunately (?) killed by slug pellets which have been laid to combat snails and smaller, but less desirable, slugs. And whilst on the subject of slug pellets here is the latest advice from the RHS:

“Scatter metaldehyde slug pellets thinly around vulnerable plants, such as seedlings and young shoots on herbaceous plants. (Pellets may harm other wildlife, pets and young children if eaten in quantity, though if they are scattered thinly there is little evidence of damage to other wildlife.) There is also a liquid formulation of metaldehyde which can be watered on to ornamental plants and the soil. A relatively new form of pelleted bait containing ferric phosphate (Growing Success Advanced Slug Killer) is relatively non-toxic to vertebrate animals.”

I have tried the last mentioned product and it seems to work. It certainly gets gobbled up overnight and it did keep the snail damage on my hostas and ligularias to manageable proportions.

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