



Slime Wars

“Long ago and far away!” . . .wait, I digress! We are involved in a war here and now! An invading army is among us! It is attacking our plants, our shrubs, our very existence as Master Gardeners! Our invaders come in many forms, mostly at night, as an army that can wipe out our garden in a single swoop! We retaliate with poisons and traps, but the invaders persist!

In order to deal effectively with our enemies, we need to know more about them—a *dossier*, so to speak. The enemies I refer to are the slugs and snails, both known as prime devastators of our gardens. As everyone knows, an army moves on its stomach--quite literally with slugs and snails, which are classified as **Gastropods**, meaning “stomach foot.”

The muscular, undulating, slime producing foot of gastropods allow them to glide easily over the ground--even over the sharp edges of razor blades--without damaging their soft skin. You might think of this as a “bullet-proof” vest. They also have periscopes to view us, retractable eyes on long upright stalks. The armored division—snails--has strong, almost impenetrable shells that protect them as they foray over the countryside. All have “aqualungs,” (internal gills) that assist in crossing rivers, streams, and wet areas.

The invasive hoard reproduces quickly. Both male and female organs are found in every soldier gastropod. Mutual impregnation assures that each is capable of producing hundreds of hungry offspring! No wonder it is so difficult to win the war!

How do we counterattack the invasive hoard? We do have a few tactics that are effective. A person I knew, I think his name was “Luke Slugwalker,” uses a pair of “slug boots,” rubber boots used to stomp on the insidious creatures. Other methods are not as direct! Since we know that rogue slug and snail warriors are insatiable drinkers, we can set up “slug bars,” containers full of beer, that attract reveling gastropods and allow them to drink ‘til they drown. We can also set up electrical barriers that consist of 3-inch copper strips set into the soil to keep them from entering our beloved gardens. Slugs touching the strips get an electric shock to turn them back. Chemical weapons can be used, but many of them are toxic to us or our pets. One that is not is a product called “Sluggo.” It is safe around pets and humans. Other methods of control and more information about slugs can be found in the publication **Field Guide to the Slug** in the General Pest Control section of our MG book collection. As we continue our quest for the perfect garden, remember the words of Obiwan Kenobe, “May the force (to battle slugs) be with you!” Good luck with your gardening this year.

