

Bell County Master Gardener  
Tip of the Week  
By Mary Lew Quesinberry

“Snails in the Garden”

Regarded as cute by some, gross by others, and despised by many, snails are among the first inhabitants of the Earth. Texas snail fauna consists of 165 terrestrial species. These members of the mollusk family have a radula in their mouth for grinding up food. Active at night and during cloudy, wet days, they eat plants and can even gnaw through limestone rock to get the calcium their shells require. The average lifespan of a snail is 15 years, some live 25 years. Snails hibernate during cold weather and times of drought.

They can be very destructive in the vegetable garden destroying newly planted seedlings. Calcium rich foods- broccoli, kale, soybeans, turnip greens spinach, peas, and okra help them grow their shells and are usually eaten. They also like basil, beans, cabbage, lettuce, and strawberries, algae, lichen, decaying plants and fruits. They will also damage ornamental plants such as hosta, marigolds, and Rudbeckia maxima.

If you don't want to feed the snails, use the resistant plants to surround the vulnerable ones. It might help. Snail resistant plants are lavender, rosemary, fuchsia, geranium, impatiens, lantana, California poppy, sages, and begonias.

Frogs, toads, snakes, birds, ducks, geese, beetles, and caterpillars are natural enemies of the snail. To help control snails, remove objects where they may hide during daytime hours. Use drip irrigation rather than overhead watering to reduce wet areas. Snails can be handpicked and relocated or destroyed. Other control methods are beer traps, copper foil barriers, and/or baits. To make a beer trap--bury a plastic cup in the soil, up to the lip.

Fill with beer. Snails will crawl to the cup and drown in the beer. Copper barriers will deter snails by providing a mild shock when they touch it. If you choose to use bait, purchase only baits containing iron phosphate. Iron phosphate baits are safe to use around pets, children and wildlife. Sprinkle baits sparingly in the evening when the snails are most active.

Have any questions about gardening in Central Texas? Contact [ask.bcmga@gmail.com](mailto:ask.bcmga@gmail.com)

Bell County master gardeners are taking applications for the next class starting January 2013. Applications can be downloaded from the website or picked up at the AgriLife Extension Office, 1605 North Main, Belton, Texas. [254-933-5305](tel:254-933-5305). The all-inclusive fee is \$250.



In the photo: Related to oysters, mussels, clams, squid and octopus, the snail is a member of the land-living Mollusk. Snails eat lichen, algae, decaying plants, fruits, vegetables and can gnaw through limestone rock to get the calcium that their shells require.