



St. Augustine Orchid Society

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Slugs and Snails

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[Orchid Growing Tips](#)

Warmth and humidity have finally arrived, ideal conditions for most orchids and their pests. Slugs and snails are some of the worst pests because they are difficult to find and eradicate. They tend to do their feeding at night along with roaches, which are a greater problem than most growers realize.

Slugs are hard to eliminate once they colonize a greenhouse. Just because you grow indoors under lights does not mean that you are not susceptible to slug damage. The biggest problem with slugs is that they are not noticed until they consume a favorite orchid bud just before it opens. If one looks carefully and knows what to look for, their telltale slime trail will be evident each morning, especially after a rainy, warm night. There are a variety of treatments for this pest ranging from stale beer in a saucer, good for small collections, to toxic sprays and baits and have children or pets that can access your plants the stale beer standby is your best bet. You may also want to look over your orchids; especially the pots after the lights have been off for a couple of hours. Slugs do not bite or harm you so they can be picked up, but they are slimy.

Baits, especially those with metaldehyde work well. The poison is usually absorbed into large sawdust-size plant material or pressed into little pellets that are spread around the top of the pot. It also comes in liquid form. Metaldehyde can damage plants so check the label and use products that have 2% metaldehyde. Do not place on leaves or roots. The product degrades quickly and will need to be applied every two weeks or so if there is a particularly bad infestation. There is a new product on the market that has worked well for some growers called Slug-go or Escar-go. The active ingredient is Iron Phosphate that interferes with the slugs' digestive system.

If the number of plants in your collection is small it can be easier to repot plants being sure to remove all potting medium from the roots and using new pots and medium. If you are growing inside, it is a good idea to clean any other surfaces in your growing area, such as trays and gravel, as eggs and small slugs hide in tiny places. This approach will also eliminate bush snails, an even worse pest.

Bush snails are tiny, an eighth inch or so long, but there may be dozens of them. They typically graze on algae, but also love newly emerging roots. They can eventually kill orchids if the infestation prevents new root growth. Some species of roaches also graze on new roots as well and it is often difficult to tell which of the two pests is doing the damage.

Frogs and toads eat large numbers of roaches and can be placed into large greenhouses. These natural predators will not be satisfactory if you are an indoor grower, as they tend to wander away from the orchids and find their way into many areas of the house where they are not appreciated, such as in your shoes. There are no satisfactory predators of slugs.