

W3.1 SPANISH SLUG: NIGHTMARE OF GARDENERS

Info sheet about Spanish slug

Spanish slug

■ WHERE DOES IT COME FROM AND WHERE DOES IT OCCUR?

It comes from the Iberian Peninsula and it is currently spreading throughout Europe with the exception of northern Scandinavia. The occurrence has also been recorded in North America.



■ WHAT DO THEY LOOK LIKE? A species from the *Arionidae* family, without shells, grows to a size of 8–12 cm and weighs up to 25 g. The colour can be in shades of orange and brown, sometimes with a grey or olive tinge.

■ WHERE DO THEY LIVE? Spanish slug likes moist, shady places where it also lays eggs. Most frequently it occurs in open habitats, in gardens, and in secondary (degraded) habitats. It is often hidden, for example, under wooden boards, in compost or composters. It goes out into the open after rain and in humid weather. It is most active at night; they can be seen during the day only in the rain. It can successfully survive dry periods, even in cracked soil as it comes from the southern areas, where they have adapted to drought.

■ HOW DOES IT REPRODUCE? It is a hermaphrodite. In the conditions of the Central European climate, it has one generation a year. It reproduces (copulates) in June and lays up to 400 eggs in late summer and autumn (eggs resemble small white beads, have a round shape and their average size is 4 mm). Young individuals hatch in the autumn or even in the spring.

■ HOW FAST DOES IT MOVE? In one night it is able to move up to 50 meters.



■ IN WHAT WAY IS IT HARMFUL? It is an invasive species that displaces the original species of native slugs and causes great damage in agriculture,

especially in the cultivation of vegetables. The problem is that hardly any natural enemies exist.

■ WHAT DOES IT FEED ON? It is an omnivorous species, more aggressive than our native slugs that are attacked and eaten by the Spanish slug. In the garden, they are largely involved eating the green leaves of plants and their fruits. The most frequently attacked plants are cabbage vegetables, carrots, radishes, but also potatoes and strawberries and fallen fruits. Of the ornamental plants, Spanish slugs like tagetes. An adult can consume up to 1 kg of plant matter per season. Interesting fact: they like beer.

■ WHICH SMELLS REPEL THEM? Fragrant plants: garlic, fern, mustard, butterbur, persimmon, garden nasturtium, sage, thyme, hyssop, onion, chives, coriander, rosemary, fennel, dill, lavender, peony, parsley, wild thyme, marigold.

■ WHICH ANIMALS FEED ON SLUGS IN NATURE? Mainly hedgehogs and some birds, including many breeds of domestic ducks (especially Indian runner), some amphibians and reptiles and large species of ground beetles. Although the adult slugs do not have many enemies, the young ones and eggs have (beetles, toads, even chickens could help). The natural parasite is the 1 mm large nematode *Phasmarhabditis hermaphrodita*.

■ WHAT DO GARDENERS DO TO GET RID OF THEM? They pour boiling water, spread salt, use scissors or feed them poisonous chemicals (e.g. British gardeners use some 650 billion slug pellets per year).