



Pest Corner

March, 2005

As Springtime unfolds, questions about slugs, moss/lichen in turf, shrubs, and trees come into the Extension office. Here is information extracted from various articles written by Don Tapio. Photos and other descriptions appear in the Hortsense CD and the Landscape Plant Problems manual.

SLUGS

Silvery mucous trails will confirm their presence and damage in seedlings, herbaceous plants (spring-blooming bulbs), and later on in ripening fruits (strawberries, artichokes, tomatoes) and susceptible flowers. Other plant-chewing pests including caterpillars, earwigs, cutworms do not leave the slimy mucous trail.

Effective slug management includes the following steps:

- 1) Eliminate the places where they hide during the day such as boards, stones, debris, leafy branches too close to the ground, weedy areas around tree trunks. Locate susceptible plants/ vegetable gardens away from these areas.
- 2) Choose slug-proof plants such as: Begonias, California poppy, fuchsias, geraniums, impatiens, lantana, nasturtiums, as well as plants with stiff leaves, and highly scented foliage like lavender, rosemary, sage.
- 3) Hand pick slugs on a regular basis, destroy, and dispose of them. Avoid spraying salt in the soil. Look under plant pots, water meter areas, sheltered areas, etc.
- 4) Place some traps such as boards raised off the ground by 1", melon rinds, etc., and dispose of the slugs that crawl underneath.
- 5) Place barriers made of 6" vertical copper flashing buried several inches around preferred plants. Dry ashes or diatomaceous earth heaped 1" high and 3" wide barriers around the garden are effective while these remain dry.
- 6) Consider some natural enemies helping slug control: Ground beetles, snakes, toads, turtles, birds, and domesticated fowl such as ducks, geese, or chickens.

7) Baits containing Metaldehyde are common, but the substance is poisonous to dogs, cats, etc. Avoid the use of metaldehyde baits in vegetable gardens, or areas where children can get to them.

8) If chemical bait is applied, use the ones with Iron Phosphate (trade names include Sluggo, Escar-Go). This type is safer to use around humans, pets, fish, birds, wildlife. As usual, follow the directions on the label. Sprinkle iron phosphate on lawns or on the soil around any vegetables, ornamentals, or fruit trees. The slugs ingest the bait, cease feeding, and die a few days afterwards.

MOSS, ALGAE, AND LICHEN

Think of moss in the lawn as a symptom of stress due to any or a combination of the following: Excessive shade, poor drainage, low fertility, soil compaction, or thin spots where turf has died.

To manage, start by making sure that the turf grasses have the best possible conditions for growth. Analyze and correct any deficiencies that relate to light, fertility, drainage, hardpan, compacted soil (after new construction). If conditions are extreme, a qualified turf professional may be needed.

To renovate an established lawn, first remove the moss by either raking and/or products registered for moss control in lawns/turf. Follow label directions carefully. The iron contained in some of these products will stain concrete and sidewalks. After the moss is dead, rake and remove it. Then, aerate the bare spots and reseed with the most appropriate type of grass seed for the site. Trees and shrubs with moss, algae, and lichen growth may look less appealing; but in most cases, this growth will not harm the plants. Lichens are frequently blamed for weakening and killing trees, but they usually appear after the decline starts. However, their growth should be controlled as they may harbor insects and hold extra water on the plant. This water may freeze into ice which is heavy on the branches.

Wet winters favor the growth of moss and lichens. Crowded planting conditions, and trees/shrubs not properly pruned, are prone to present with more moss and algae growth. Prune to open up the plant canopy allowing better air circulation and light penetration.

Deciduous plants: Dormant sprays of lime sulphur applied in January, according to label directions, should give adequate control in deciduous plants. Evergreens (rhododendrons and conifers): Dormant sprays on evergreen plants may cause injury to the leaves. Prune infested branches instead.