

Protect your garden from slugs, snails

Those pesky pests need to be taught a few lessons

Their mouths have up to 27,000 razor-sharp, backward-facing teeth that are routinely lost and replaced. They can eat several times their weight in living or dead flesh every day. They originated in the earth's early oceans, but they are not sharks. They are the dreaded, slimy slugs and snails, and they have crawled onto land to devour your plants.

Few pests inspire such intense dislike as the lowly slug. Maybe it's because they're slimy. Perhaps it's the fact that a single slug can lay as many as 500 eggs per year, so there always seem to be plenty around.

Gardeners try a variety of methods to deal with these slimy monsters.

Unfortunately, slugs are hard to kill. They are large-bodied creatures compared to many pests, so they have to eat a large amount of any poison to die from it.

Slugs and snails have been recognized as crop pests for several hundred years, with few effective control strategies. For the home gardener, however, there is good news. With a little effort, you can prevail over slugs and snails. Here are some weapons for your arsenal:

1. Alter the environment — Sanitation will rid your garden of slug hiding places. Clear out plant rubbish, boxes, boards and other places where they can lay their eggs. Keep the garden area trimmed

of grasses and weeds. Avoid overwatering.

Cultivate between rows, with a tiller if possible. Cultivation kills some slugs outright and reduces the large cracks in the soil where they like to hide.

2. Create barriers — A new product available in garden centers and home-improvement stores, Concern Slug Stop, is a barrier of coconut-oil soap that comes in a tube like toothpaste. Slugs hate this stuff. They will try to go around it, but if your Slug Stop circle is unbroken, they eventually will give up and go elsewhere. Be sure to clean up overhanging weeds and other debris around plants protected by Slug Stop. Slugs can climb trees, so apply a closed ring of Slug Stop directly to the trunk of your tree or shrub, at least a few inches off the ground. Then, remove any low-hanging branches, and cut back all weedy growth under the tree.

3. Trapping — Put a hollowed-out half of a grapefruit or orange upside down in the garden, propped up on a stone or twig, so slugs can get underneath. Clean out slugs in the morning.

4. Poison at your own risk — Slug and snail baits are responsible for many accidental poisonings for this simple reason — they look like food pellets to small animals. Some brands are colored bright red and resemble candy to children. It takes only 2 teaspoons of metaldehyde to kill an adult human. Such a small lethal dose makes these products a serious hazard to pets, children and backyard birds. In addition, slugs and snails that die from eating the bait are now poisonous to predators, like birds. It isn't worth it.

Ask the right questions when buying a tractor

Shopping for the right tractor for your yard can be confusing. There are many brands and, at first glance, they seem similar. To get your money's worth, ask these questions:

HOW WELL IS IT MADE? — Ask about the design and manufacture of the tractor to assess its quality and durability. To assure longevity, look for all-steel construction, including the hood. Also, check the tractor's frame design. For maximum durability, look for a channel frame design, welded for added strength. Different gauges of steel support critical stress areas, making a channel frame more rugged than the single-piece stamped frame usually found on less-expensive units.

HOW WELL DOES IT CUT? — There are three keys to a great cut: the mowing deck, the turning radius and the traction. Examine how the mowing deck is mounted on the tractor. Look for an axle-mounted mowing deck that "floats" freely, adjusting to changes in terrain. This deck mounting system follows the contours of your yard, reducing scalping and providing a smooth, even cut.

Another sign of a great cut is the ability to manicure around landscaping, minimizing the trimming required after mowing. Look for a tractor with a tight turning radius to complete the job efficiently, one that's capable of mowing around trees and shrubs in one pass. Finally, just like in a car, look for features that improve traction. Good traction ensures that the tractor's wheels will not slip when climbing steep inclines or mowing wet, slippery areas.

HOW EASY IS IT TO USE AND MAINTAIN? — Remember that a tractor should make your yard chores easier and less tiring. The design and ergonomics of a unit make a difference. Simplicity suggests that you have the products demonstrated by dealers before you buy. You should sit in the seat and then ask yourself: Are the controls conveniently located? How simple are key operator tasks, like adjusting the cutting height or engaging the mower deck? Is the seat comfortable and easily adjustable for different operators? Also, while you are at the dealership, make sure that routine maintenance is truly routine.



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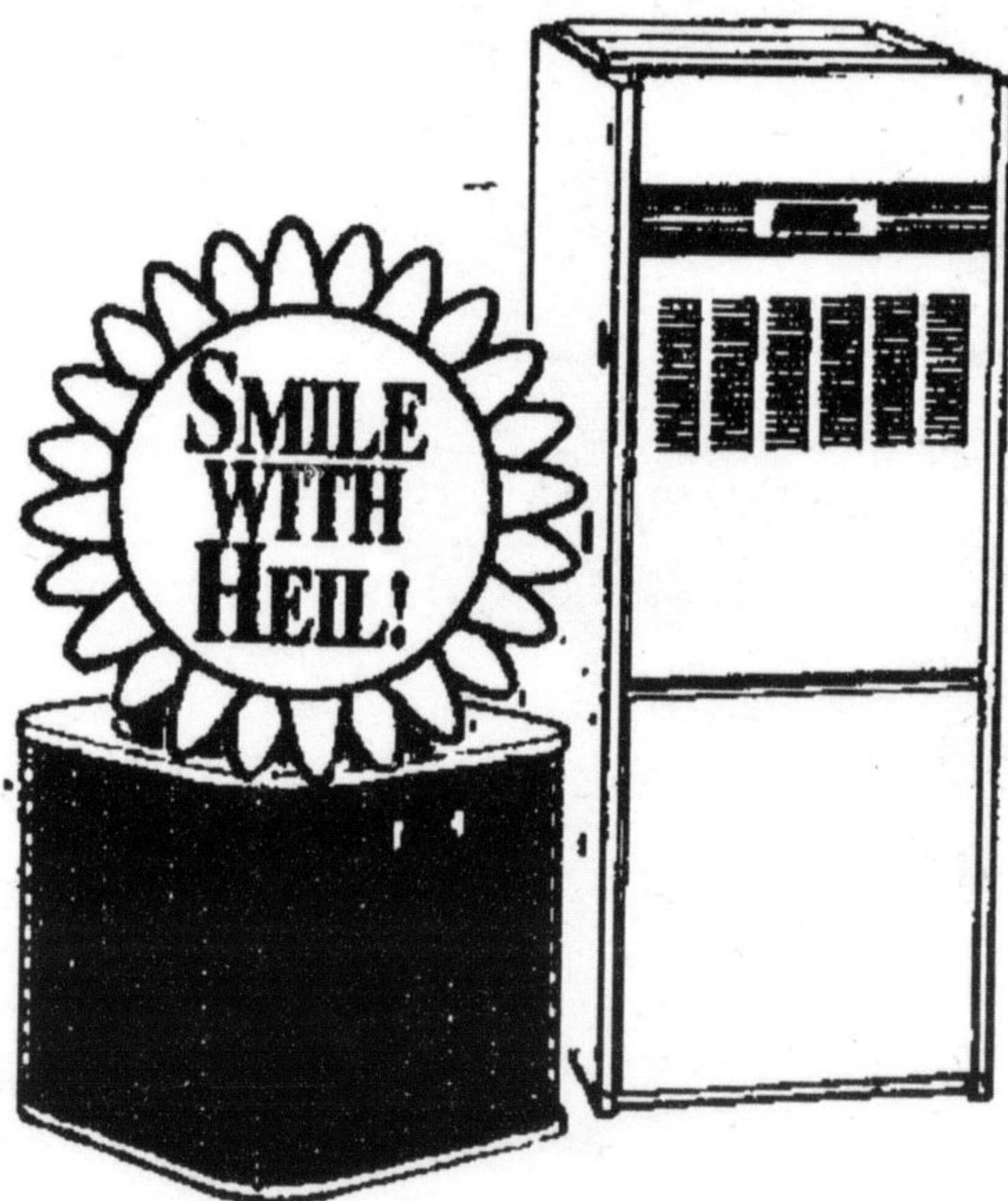
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