

Garden Pests

By : **JPRH**

Slugs are a natural garden pest. Imagine what they could do if they grew ten, a hundred, a thousand times bigger?

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It seems like a dream now, the summer just gone. It was a wet one, yes, and a scary one too. Iâve kept all the newspapers. I still have dreams about it, bad dreams. One day I hope theyâll stop and I can forget about what happened. But I canât yet, I just canât.

It was a late August day when I first noticed the start of it. I was brushing my teeth when I saw a dark shape on the outside of the window. It was about half way up the glass. Being a frosted pane I couldnât see exactly what it was, but it was about an inch long, narrow, and blackish. That image sticks in my head now because of what happened later; Iâd have probably forgotten otherwise. But looking back, that was the start of it. I spat out the toothpaste and got on with my day.

A couple of days later I popped into the kitchen to make a cup of tea. I glanced up at the window and saw several dark blobs on the outside of the glass, like the other day in the bathroom. I could see them clearly this time, and there must have been around a dozen or so of them. Slugs. Their slimy underbellies slightly squashed and whitened by the pressure of the glass. They sat there, motionless, but also strangely aware, like they were watching me, and knew I was watching them. I wondered whether it was natural behaviour I was witnessing, but could find nothing in my past experience to back that up. In theory, yes, slugs were slimy and could stick to things, but something about what I was seeing felt wrong. Disgusted, I impulsively opened the back door and grabbed the broom which was resting against the wall. I swept back and forth feverishly, slugs falling off everywhere, some onto the floor and others sticking in the bristles. I whacked the broom down hard onto the patio floor again and again to shake them out, and then on the wall of the house to make sure theyâd all gone. Looking up, I could see little blobs of slime dotted around the window. I picked up a bucket which was half full of rain water, and emptied its contents with a hard splash against the glass. I left the little twisted balls of slime where theyâd fallen. Later on, I returned and covered them with salt.

As the weeks progressed, more and more slugs appeared. Some were small, about as big as a childâs little finger, some bigger, the size of a Cumberland sausage, and some were freakishly big, as large as a hamster, say. Not a day would go by without my opening the curtains to masses of them clinging to the window. They were everywhere. On walls of houses, cars, trees, anywhere you can think of. The worse thing was how big they could get.

On the Tuesday morning, it was terrible. The hallway was darkened by the sheer number of slugs on the glass of the door. I opened it and stepped out. The scene that confronted me was apocalyptic. Slugs the size of cats clung to trees and bushes, their vast gaping holes of mouths inhaling vegetation. The ground was a sea of them. Their number was staggering. They were a mix of colours and markings. Black ones, Brown ones, almost white ones. Stripy, spotted, speckled; a seemingly endless array of different, grossly beautiful designs. Over the slug-covered road, a nightmare vision caught my eye. A pair of legs lay sticking out of the dark green bush at the edge of Mrs Humphreyâs lawn. With a sickening realization, I understood what I was seeing. The dark green bush wasnât a bush at all, it was an enormous, ravenous slug. The scene reminded me of the wicked witch of the east, flattened by Dorothyâs house. I turned to re-enter the house, and was immediately smothered by a wet, warm pillow, stinking of dank moss and rot; I was face to face with a slug as big as a pony. Feeling like small prey against this disgusting, alien-like lump of primordial slime, I tried to push it away, then my hands slipped and slid in the warm gunk of its body. The slug seemed to suck me in to itself, and I felt my stomach lurch and legs go weak. Before I could shout for help my legs gave way beneath

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me and I fell backwards onto the hard ground at the front of my door. The sweating, heavy hulk of the slug towered over me and I saw its massive air hole opening and closing, opening and closing. Pulsing. Its foul breath was like the devil's armpit. The strange jagged slit which was its mouth opened in a sneer, and I lay there, paralysed, as daylight disappeared into darkness.

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