

Slaters and their control

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Slaters are also known as woodlice, sowbugs and pill bugs. They are crustaceans and are related to the normally aquatic or marine crabs, lobsters and prawns but are adapted to living on land. They still need damp conditions, and will die if exposed to open and dry situations. Because of this, they tend to be active at night when the risk of dehydration is low.

The species of slaters found commonly in Australian gardens are introduced from other parts of the world.

Female slaters keep their eggs in a pouch until the young hatch. Hatchlings then leave the parent and are completely independent. Slaters grow through a series of moults in which the outer rigid skeleton is shed, allowing growth to the next larger and finally adult stage. During moulting the slater is very vulnerable and must find shelter.

Mulch, compost and regular watering in gardens favours the development of dense slater populations as they feed mainly on decaying organic matter. They help the breakdown of organic matter and can be beneficial to the garden at low population densities. At high densities, they can damage new seedlings and ripe fruit, such as strawberries in contact with the ground. Orchid growers report slaters feeding on the roots and damaging the growing tips of plants.

Cultural control

Where slaters are considered pests, try to make the garden less favourable to them. Reduce compost to the minimum and disturb it frequently by raking in the middle of hot, dry days. Slaters shelter under objects in contact with the ground. Reduce the amount of harbourages by removing empty pots and stacks of timber, bricks and rocks.

Chemical control

Treat areas supporting high slater populations with snail baits containing methiocarb (Baysol® Snail and Slug Pellets) or iron EDTA (Multiguard Multicrop Snail and Slug Killer).



Figure 1. Slaters are scavengers that feed on decaying organic matter



Figure 2. Mulch and compost encourage slaters

Alternatively, several brands of lawn granular insecticides are registered for the control of slaters. Ask the retailer which ones are appropriate.

Warning

Be careful when applying baits to avoid the accidental poisoning of children and pets. Read the label and follow the directions.

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