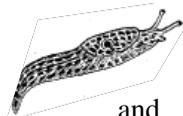


Mudpuppy's Pond

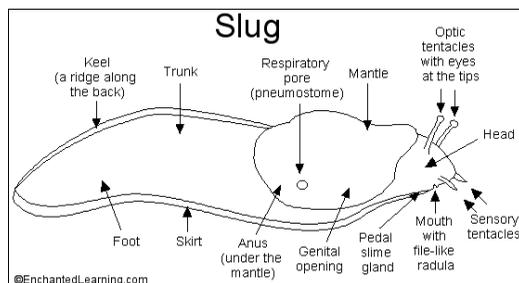
Slugs in the Garden

by Debby Barker



Have you ever gone out into your yard early in the morning and noticed a silver trail on the sidewalk? Have you wondered what sort of animal would make a trail like that and how it is made?

The culprit is a slug. Slugs are snails without a shell. Really, they have remnants of shell hidden within their bodies. Take a look at the diagram and you can see all the parts of a slug.



A slug's eyes are light sensitive and are positioned on the long tentacles on the top of his head. The shorter tentacles that extend downward are used for feeling and smelling. Slugs have a single lung (not two like most animals); the tiny hole on the right side of his body (labeled respiratory pore) connects to the slug's lung

Slugs secrete a slimy substance whenever they crawl. The slime makes it easier for them to move and protects them from sharp rocks, twigs and other objects in their path. A slug could crawl over an upright razor blade and would not get cut. Slugs mostly rely on their sense of smell to find their way around. They can use their slimy trails to guide them back to their tunnels. When the slime trails dry, they turn into silver tracks.

Did you know that slugs are related to oysters, clams and octopi? They are all mollusks. A slug is a special kind of mollusk, called a gastropod. The name means 'stomach foot'. Some other kinds of gastropods are snails and conches. Mollusks have been on earth for millions of years and haven't changed very much in all that time.

Because they could easily dry out, slugs remain where it's cool and damp during the day. They come out at night to forage for food. They usually eat leaves and often visit gardens. Take a flashlight some evening and look for them after sunset.

Some more interesting facts about slugs

- Slugs are invertebrates, which means that they don't have a backbone. In fact, they don't have bones at all.
- Slugs don't have teeth or tongues. They have a special organ called a radula that has thousands of tiny protrusions that help them grind up their food.
- Slugs lay eggs on the surface of the soil, under leaves. The eggs can survive for several years, until the conditions are right for them to hatch.
- Most of a slug's body is the huge muscle that is the foot. It creeps along by contracting a series of muscles on the underside of the body (making a wave that goes from the back end to the front).
- Slugs are hermaphrodite, which means that they have male and female organs and can fertilize their own eggs.
- The biggest slug in the United States is the Banana Slug; it can grow to be nearly a foot long!
- Slugs can absorb oxygen directly from the atmosphere, in addition to breathing through the respiratory pore.
- Slugs don't really like hot weather so they are more active in the spring and the fall.
- Slugs are very sensitive to the wind and dehydrate and die if caught in a wind.
- Depending on the species, slugs live from one to six years. Older slugs are usually female.

(Sources: Missouri Department of Conservation, Enchantedlearning.com and the Missouri Agricultural Electronic Bulletin-Board. Diagram from enchantedlearning.com -- drawing from <http://agebb.missouri.edu/hort/meg/archives/v7n3/meg5.htm>.)