



**St. Augustine Orchid Society**

[www.staugorchidsociety.org](http://www.staugorchidsociety.org)

## **Controlling Snails and Slugs**

### **Orchid Alert**

Courtesy of Dr. Martin Motes, Motes Orchids, from his book *Florida Orchid Growing*

Snails and slugs are recurring problems in orchid collections. Recurring because they are ubiquitous, persistent, and hard to completely control. They recur whenever the weather is favorably wet for them to move about with ease. These mollusks save their energy during dry periods to maximize their energy in eating our orchids when the environment is favorable.

Slugs and snails are creatures of habit. When they have found a lush patch of flowers or soft new growth they feed there at night and then follow their silver trails back to their snug resting places for the day. Old pots, boards, piles of decaying leaves or other vegetable material are mollusk hotels. The moist potting soil of ferns or other foliage plants can serve as bed and breakfast. These are the places to round up the usual suspects! Better still clean up these blighted parts of the neighborhood and eliminate the spawning grounds of these criminal elements.

When one actually encounters one of these slime balls whether at their home or at large, the crunch of their shells underfoot is always satisfying. Unfortunately, like other unsavory types they do most of their work late in the night when honest folk are abed. For this reason leaving these hungry night workers a snack in the form of metaldehyde bait is the most effect control for snails and slugs. These mollusks are fatally attracted to metaldehyde. They are drawn like moths to the flame. Spread the bait thinly, one pellet every foot or so. They'll find it. The smaller the pellets the better. Those small pellets which fall on desirable plants will do little or no harm and small bits are less attractive and potentially less injurious to domestic animals.

Repeated applications at weekly or biweekly intervals (depending on rainfall) are absolutely essential. Bait is washed away by rain and irrigation. One also never manages to get all the pests with a single application. Any mature snail or slug has also almost surely reproduced and the next generation will be along soon. Please don't leave any starving orphan snails out there. Those repeated light applications of metaldehyde bait are like manna from heaven for snails.

Metaldehyde also comes in liquid form which can be sprayed to eliminate bush snails in hanging plants. Great care should be exercised in its use.

