Developing Countries Farm Radio Network

Pack 13, Item 1

Type: Script

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**No-cost protection from slugs and snails**

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Information on this subject area was requested by DCFRN participants in Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Fiji, Ghana, Guyana, India, Lesotho, Malawi, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, Swaziland, Taiwan, Tanzania, Trinidad, Uganda, and Zambia.

Presenter: George Atkins

Interviewee: Wingrove Davis, Farmer, St. Michael, Barbados

**Suggested introduction**

We at this radio station are part of a worldwide information network that gathers farming information from developing countries all over the world. It's the Developing Countries Farm Radio Network, sponsored by the Canadian International Development Agency, Massey Ferguson, and the University of Guelph.

Through this Network, we bring you information on ways to increase food supplies for your family, or to sell—ways that other farmers have used successfully.

Today we have information to help you deal with a very common type of pest that attacks many kinds of growing plants. Here's George Atkins.

**ATKINS:** Let's think about slugs and snails; those soft-bodied creatures that like to live in moist places. They feel slimy when you touch their bodies.

Those snails and slugs do a lot of damage to vegetable crops that grow above and below the ground—and to tree crops as well. They eat soft, green leaves that are so necessary if the plant is to produce well; and with green leafy vegetables, that's the very part that we eat. They can be a terrible pest! Actually, we don't see much of these pests because they don't like to move around during the daytime. They usually wait until it's dark, a time when their wet slimy bodies won't dry out as much as they would in the daytime; a time when there's more moisture where they want to go to get to the things they like to eat.

You see it's that wet slime on their bodies that allows them to move easily. They actually produce it themselves and make their own slippery tracks as they move. You can often see where slugs and snails have moved at night, because when those slippery tracks dry out, they look like silvery lines wherever they've been.

"So," you may say, "if we don't see them around during the day, where do they go?"

Well, they like to be where it's moist. So in the daytime, they hide below the soil surface, in mulch or in moist places under piles of rubbish, leaves, or other things where it doesn't dry out during the day.

One good way of having fewer of these pests is to keep your garden and the land around it neat and tidy, leaving no such places nearby for them to hide. They can, however, travel quite a long way at night so it's always possible for some of them to attack your crops and fruit trees. There are other ways, though, to deal with this problem.

One way is to leave boards or pieces of tree bark on the ground between the rows in your garden. The pests will collect under them in the early morning; then in the daytime, you can just gather them up and get rid of them in some convenient way.

Of course, there are other living creatures that feed on slugs and snails, creatures like some beetles and bugs, lizards, toads, turtles, and also chickens and ducks. They help a lot in controlling these pests, so they're good to have around.

Some people have found that commercial nitrogen fertilizer will kill slugs and snails or they may buy chemical poison to deal with the problem. There are some other ways, however, that cost little or no money.

One of the good ways to prevent these pests from attacking your food crops is to set out shallow pans or even jar lids at ground level and pour beer into them. Yes, I said beer! Slugs like beer! They can smell it from a long way off and they'll come to it, drink it, and drown in it! If you don't have beer but you do have sour milk, you could try that instead—some farmers use it.

Another way is to make the soil bare around your fruit tree or the crop you want to protect. After that, you can create a barrier on this bare ground that snails and slugs won't cross. There are several materials you could use for this barrier.

One thing they don't like is very sharp sand. This kind of sand is often found in a dry stream bottom or on a sandy beach. Something else they don't like is lime—dry, powdery lime. Both of those things irritate the pest's body.

For keeping slugs and snails away in the dry season, perhaps the easiest thing for many people to use in this way is ordinary dry wood ashes. Because they're dry, they take up moisture from the pest's body making it much harder to move, so slugs and snails don't like to get into dry dusty wood ashes. Perhaps you have wood ashes you could use.

A good way is to make a very shallow trench in the bare soil around your plants or tree and put some dry wood ashes in it. It can be 8 to 10 centimetres (3 or 4 inches) wide and 5 centimetres (2 inches) deep all around the tree. As long as the ashes are dry, your food crop will be safe from slugs and snails. If rain washes the ash away, you can put more into the trench. One thing you should know, however, is that too much wood ashes or too much lime can affect your soil in a way that won't be good for your plants. (It makes it more alkaline.) So please keep that in mind.

In Barbados, as I visited with a group of farmers, one of them, Wingrove Davis, told me this.

**DAVIS:** Slugs and snails don't like travelling (moving) on wood ash. So you just put a bit all the way around the tree, so that from the time they enter (the ash) until they get over, it sticks on them and they're covered with ash. So they just don't cross over and they'll be stopped completely there—and that's it.

So that is one way that I've found that you can keep slugs and snails from your trees, young plants, cabbages, and things like that by using wood ash, rather than having to use any money to buy poison.

**ATKINS:** Wingrove Davis, a farmer in the parish of St. Michael in Barbados. He uses wood ash instead of buying poison to keep snails and slugs away from his fruit trees, young plants, and cabbages.

Serving Agriculture, the Basic Industry, this is George Atkins.

**Notes**

1. The main message in this item is that problems caused by an important type of pest, slugs and snails, can be dealt with at little or no cost. There are other DCFRN items dealing with low-cost or no-cost methods of protection from pests that you might wish to use in association with this item. They are:

Some Farmers Control Insects Without Cost - DCFRN Package 1, Item 1

A Simple but Effective Fly Trap - DCFRN Package 1, Item 8

Chickens Reduce Insect Pests - DCFRN Package 4, Item 9B

Insects Die in Airtight Grain Storage - DCFRN Package 6, Item 8

A Simple Solution to a Big Pest Problem - DCFRN Package 7, Item 9B

Knowing Insect Life Cycles Helps You Control Pests - DCFRN Package 10, Item 8

Preventing Insect Pest Damage to Crops - DCFRN Package 10, Item 9

A Light Trap for Insect Pests -DCFRN Package 11, Item 4

Raising Ducks in the Paddy Field - DCFRN Package 11, Item 5

Aphid Control at Little Cost, Part 1 A Homemade Insecticide for Aphids - DCFRN Package 11, Item 6

Aphid Control at Little Cost - Part 2 Applying Your Homemade Insecticide - DCFRN Package 11, Item 7

2. This item features the use of the no-cost material, wood ash, as a farming input for farmers for whom it is readily available. There are other DCFRN items containing suggestions for good uses for wood ash. You might wish to use information from them in association with this item. They are:

Some Farmers Control Insects Without Cost - DCFRN Package 1, Item 1

Making Your Own Compost - DCFRN Package 2, Item 4

Watering Seedlings and Applying N0-COST Fertilizer - DCFRN Package 6, Item 6.

**Information source**

1. DCFRN participant John Cropper of Guyana arranged the interview with farmer, Wingrove Davis of Barbados, part of which is included in this item. Other information in this item was sent to us by the following DCFRN participants:

Charles James, Dominica

Dr. J.F. Gonsalves, Philippines

David C. Kambikiya, Zambia

Dr. Stuart Hill, Canada

David Dixon, BBC

John C. Jeavons, USA