

DIRTY FINGERNAILS AND ALL

Discovering cup gardening

BY SIOUX ROGERS

"Not again," I whimpered as I glared in horror at the remains of the third replanting of my spring plants. I thought I had planted broccoli, cabbage, brussels sprout, kale, and...

Them dang small, slimy brown slugs knew I did and munched them down to remnants of old lace. "Dang" is a political garden statement for full-out slug warfare. I mean as in *no fooling around*. I had heard I could or should put copper wire around all my raised beds to keep slugs out. *Wrong!*

Wonder if I ate slugs, would I be long and slim like a snake?

First, I cannot afford to do that and second, they drop out of the sky at night and bypass the copper barrier. So obviously that will not work.

Next plan: beer! I heard that one before. It is supposed to work. Problem with that was I did not have enough beer to share with the slugs and for me to enjoy while planting. I won. Well, maybe I didn't win because the slugs did not seem very interested in the strategically placed wee lids full of lager. Wait, I know, broccoli and beer, yum.

Moving along to the next plan. Place small planks of wood between vegetable rows, and in the morning I catch the sleeping slugs. Perfect plan, but only a few sleeping slugs are found in the AM and the vegetables are looking more and more like antique green lace.

Seems as though everyone has their own personal formula for "slug sleuthing." I'm sure you have all heard the nocturnal regime of using the flashlight as a spyglass: handpick the little buggers off and drop them into soapy water. That does *not* work for me because when I go to grab them, they whoosh out between my fingers and never make it to the soapy water.

Oh, here is a great one for all you reptilian lovers. Snakes love slugs, their favorite. So don't kill the snakes. Wonder if I ate slugs, would I be long and slim like a snake?

Don't forget that "wonderful" fine powder, diatomaceous earth. How stupid is that? It becomes useless when it dissolves into the dirt every time you water.

Here are a few other suggestions:

Coffee. "New research has found caffeine to be very effective at dispatching slugs." (<http://www.gardensalive.com/>

[article.asp?ai=627](http://www.gardensalive.com/article.asp?ai=627)) I am always suspicious of the phrase "new research." Anyhow, this suggestion did not say if the slugs like cream and sugar with their coffee. Actually, putting your spent coffee grounds around the base of each plant annoys those buggers so much that they drop dead of frustration. However, this "solution" means you can't touch the soil or the coffee grounds will become one with the earth.

Oh, here is a really good idea. "Surround your plants with a protective barrier of hair. The slugs will get all tangled up in it and strangle, and the hair will eventually add plant-feeding nitrogen to the soil." (<http://www.gardensalive.com/article.asp?ai=627>)

I just knew my super tiny slugs would be escape artists. From the same website were a few other suggestions, some of which I have tried, such as citrus peels as slug traps (some larger creature ate the peels), white vinegar spray (I burned the plants and they hated me), lightning bugs (hellooooo, not everyone lives in the Midwest), ducks (that is a hoot—my ducks would eat more baby vegetables than a truckload of slugs. So I think not on ducks.). Toads—good idea but I haven't seen toads being sold at the supermarket. Humph. Lastly, there was a suggestion for

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"rove beetles." All is not so perfect here, either. Doing a little detective work, I found out that while these rove beetles are great on the cleanup crew, they have chosen earthworms as their favorite food. So, *not!*

Back at the drawing table I re-examined all the options, short of cementing the raised garden beds and planting gnomes. Those tiny garden slugs dine on new baby vegetable leaves, they hide in the soil, usually sleep during the day, party at night and are excellent climbers. With all of this knowledge I smartly banded each and every new little stalk with tinfoil. Nope, did not work!

So now where are we? The aha moment arrived: my "Cup Garden." After trying all of the above unsuccessfully, it was a clear decision that a new plan of attack was needed. Finally, a brain explosion of smarts. I had Honey get several dozen ten-ounce clear or semi-opaque plastic cups. (Well, of course I bought them from the

Dollar store.) I looked at all the surviving plants, even the semi-munched ones, and calculated what I had growing and what was gone. Next step was to keep the cups stacked together in order to keep them sturdy for upcoming cup surgery: razor-cutting the bottom off every cup. Okay, Honey did the surgery for me.

Then I took one cup at a time and slipped the cutoff end over the top of the small plants and "screwed" it into the soft ground. I think I tried it the other way, putting the original mouth opening in first, but somehow that did not work as well. I believe the razored-off edge cut through the soil easier. That being done, I did put out some more lids with beer and a few boards here and there, but did not really catch too many of the brown/black slippery things in the morning. Mind you, the slugs were still in attack mode, but with the cups I could see and catch them before their midnight snacking. So for three nights in a row, I went out to the garden with a flashlight and small clippers. I could see and *snip* those little buggers crawling up and down the cups. Get the idea of the clear cup?

That is it. The plants grew better than I have ever had them grow, probably because they did not have so many setbacks. My brussels sprouts grew over five feet tall. While the plants were still young I could easily feed them a cup full of whatever was the soup du jour and it would go right down to their little roots, no spreading into the outer soil.

The plants grew so large that I removed the cups when they started to



Sioux Rogers—And the beet goes on.

bind the stalks—and before the sun started to disintegrate the plastic.

After harvest, I went back through the garden in search of any missed disintegrating plastic. You do not want that mulching in your garden—at least I don't. Any questions?

Dirty Fingernails and All
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"Unemployment is capitalism's way of getting you to plant a garden."
—Orson Scott Card



Top photo: Red cabbage plants when clear plastic cups were first placed over them for slug control. Bottom photo: The same red cabbage after several weeks of successful cup gardening.

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