

THE SCANDINAVIAN CANNIBAL SLUG METHOD

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Thinking back to my childhood growing up in Denmark, the Danish garden style was nothing to write home about. Even today, the majority of Danish gardens consist of a lawn, perhaps punctuated by a shrub, surrounded by a green hedge.

My Nan, who was my first garden hero, had a huge garden. It didn't really compare to an English garden - unless your passion is vegetables, fruit bushes and a wide row of bedding plants. In Denmark, however, people would divert their route just to catch a glimpse of it. The locals nicknamed her 'The Strawberry Queen'.

After my Nan, my mother began to take an interest in her own garden, and while I was studying at The Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew we went to countless gardens and horticultural shows together. She enjoyed being invited onto show gardens at the various RHS shows either myself or friends attended. My partner and I eventually moved up to the North West, and bought an Edwardian villa with a big garden (for a townhouse). My mother was very excited when we started renovating the garden.

On one visit she said, 'I love seeing what you have done to the garden, but I don't understand why you have so many slugs.' What! I nearly died. Here I was with my qualification from Kew Gardens and my shiny medals from the RHS, and my mother tells me I need to sort out my slug issues.

When we were gardening on heavy London clay we were lucky in having a resident hedgehog living in our garden, so our slug problems were very minimal. We try to be as organic as we can; I hate slug pellets. When my mother suggested I get rid of the slugs, my heart sank - I felt like a little boy again, needing his mother's help. I asked her how I should go about it. She seemed rather surprised at my lack of know-how, and replied, 'why don't you use the cannibal slug method?'. So here it is.

The Cannibal Slug Method

The first treatment should be carried out in April-May, when the slugs who survived winter slowly start getting active, then repeated throughout the summer every 2-3 weeks.

Nematodes are tiny parasitic worms which use other organisms as hosts. Go online, or visit your local garden centre, and buy a pack of nematodes for slugs, often sold under the name Nemaslug. In late afternoon, mix 1-2 tsp of Nemaslug powder into 1 litre tepid water, mix well and leave the mixture standing for a minimum of 1 hour, out of direct sunlight.

Go slug hunting. If you are squeamish, get someone else to help you. Collect as many slugs you can find and chop the slugs in half with a sharp spade or scissors. Place the cut slugs into a bucket.

When you have collected as many as you want (the more the better), thoroughly stir the nematode mixture again, as some of the powder will have sunk to the bottom of the container. Pour the mixture over the cut slugs and leave it stand for 10 minutes, so that the nematodes can penetrate the dead slugs and become active.

Now go out into your garden and start placing a spoonful of the mixture on your most slug-affected areas. Ideal sites might be underneath shrubs, deep inside herbaceous borders and on the vegetable patch. This is best done at dusk; the nematodes must not dry out and evening is the best time to place the treatment, so try to time the whole process carefully.

During the night the slugs in your garden will be attracted to the easy pickings of dead slugs, and will choose to eat them instead of your prize plants. They will, in turn, become parasitised by the nematodes and die after two days, when more slugs will eat them...and so on.

For best results, repeat the procedure during the summer. It's even more effective if you can get your next door neighbour to do it too. This way of controlling slugs is so hugely successful in Scandinavia that some councils now send out Nemaslug to all households to encourage everyone to keep the slug population under control.

I hope the cannibal slug method brings you positive results. Even if the Scandinavians might not be the greatest gardeners, they definitely have given us English gardeners something we can use with great success in our own gardens.

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