

# Slugs



Grey Field Slug

## Introduction

There are 14 species of slug in New Zealand and just 4 of them are likely to cause damage:

- Grey field slug (*Deroceras reticulatum*)
- Brown field slug (*Deroceras panormitanum*)
- Jet slug (*Milax gagates*)
- Orange soled slug or orange slug (*Arion hortensis*)

In many situations slugs can cause significant damage especially at pasture establishment.

## Identification

The grey field slug (pictured above) is the slug thought to be the species of greatest economic importance.

## Life cycle

Little is known about the life cycle of slugs in New Zealand. Generally, slugs can reproduce all year round when conditions are suitable. Slugs are most active between dusk and dawn. A life cycle may take 3-9 months depending on the rate of development of eggs and immature slugs.

## Damage

Slugs are present in most pastures throughout the year, generally causing little significant damage. Slug numbers are greatest under favourable weather conditions, with moist soil, moderate temperature and high levels of humidity. Slugs pose the greatest risk when re-sowing pastures, particularly if direct drilling. Trash left in the paddock at time of sowing can favour slug populations. Slugs will move along drill rows eating and may destroy all germinating seed and seedlings.

## Management

Slug numbers can be determined by laying out moist sacks overnight. If any more than 6 per slugs per sack are found, then doing something to control slugs is recommended. There are a number of options:

- Mob stocking (stocking rates at least 350 cow days/ha or 1500 sheep days/ha)
- There are many chemical (molluscicide) options such as:
  - SlugOut® (Coverage is important because slugs find their food mainly by chance since they can only detect food from very close up)
  - MesuroI
  - Dismissal

Since most slugs will not actively burrow into soil like earthworms, it is usually only cloddy seed beds that provide hiding places for slugs and therefore sustain damage. AgResearch trials have shown that the best control is achieved when baits are broadcast either prior to planting (1-5 days) or at planting, except where a well defined drill furrow remains after sowing. In this situation it was found that within 2 days of sowing almost all slugs were living and feeding within the drill furrow. Under these circumstances it is important that either all the baits, or a proportion of the baits are drilled into the furrow along with the seed.

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