Creating physical barriers at ground level
Clothes and copper rings provide a barrier against slugs and snails for young plants. Mulches such as fresh soot, sharp sand, gravel (inset, below) and products made from mineral granules, crushed shells or wool all deter gastropod movement across the soil.

- What they do The barriers are made of substances that slugs and snails are less likely to cross. Wool pellets have a slight drying action.
- Effectiveness Slugs and snails can cross barriers. Some slugs travel through soil underneath mulches.

To maintain effectiveness, barriers need to surround susceptible plants completely and mulches must be replenished regularly, such as after heavy rain. Take care not to trap any slugs or snails within the barrier. Reports that coffee grounds are a suitable barrier are unsubstantiated and based on a misinterpretation of research which investigated the chemical caffeine as a control and not coffee grounds.
- Typical plants to protect Newly established and favoured individual plants as shoots emerge in spring.

Using slug pellets
Slugs and snails can be controlled by pellets containing metaldehyde or ferric phosphate in a cereal and yeast base that acts as an attractant.

- What they do Metaldehyde causes excessive production of slime in dry conditions, slugs and snails dehydrate and die, but they can recover in wet conditions. Ferric phosphate is considered organic by some authorities and affects calcium metabolism in the gut of slugs and snails, they usually die within a week.
- How to apply For efficient and safe use, scatter thinly on the soil according to manufacturer’s instructions. Replace pellets as they break down.
- Effectiveness Several applications may be required throughout the growing season (again, check instructions). Metaldehyde pellets can harm other wildlife and pets if eaten in quantity. A liquid formulation of metaldehyde can be watered onto ornamental plants and surrounding soil.
- Typical plants to protect Seedlings, young plants and emerging shoots.

Protecting containers
Growing susceptible plants in containers can reduce the likelihood of slug and snail damage, but you can give extra protection by using other methods such as pellets and nematodes. Barrels (examples below) can reduce the likelihood of slugs or snails causing damage to container plantings - provided no slugs or snails are already present on plants or in the potting compost.

- Effectiveness Copper-based barriers will give the best results; copper has an irritating and repellent effect on slugs and snails. It does not kill them, however, and will not reduce their numbers. Keep the barriers free of debris and ensure they completely encircle the container.

Copper tape
Use easy-to-apply self-adhesive tape to give a continuous copper barrier around the container.

Pot feet
Lift containers off the ground to reduce points of access for slugs and snails. Copper pot feet act as an extra deterrent.

Gravel tray
Sit pots on drainage trays filled with a good layer of sharp gravel to act like a barrier mulch.

Other methods to try
- Remove slugs and snails by hand, ideally by torchlight searches on mild, damp evenings.
- Place traps made of cabbage leaves, grapefruit skins or hollowed-out potatoes on the ground to provide shelter for slugs and snails during the day and then dispose of them.
- Bait jam jars or proprietary traps, placed in the soil, with beer or black treacle diluted with water to trap and drown slugs and snails.
- Encourage into the garden the many predators of slugs and snails including thrushes, frogs, moles, shrews, hedgehogs, slowworms and ground beetles.
- Cultivate the soil and disturb places where slugs and snails are sheltering to expose them to predators.
- Certain potatoes have some resistance to slugs including ‘Charlotte’ (second early, salad), ‘Estima’ (second early) and ‘Tantau’ (maincrop). Potatoes lifted before September usually escape the worst damage.

Biological control
A pathogenic nematode specific to molluscs, Heterophrudus hermaphroditus (sold as Nemuslay) can help control slugs biologically.

- What they do These microscopic wormlike creatures enter a slug’s body (below) and release bacteria that kill it.
- When to apply When soil temperatures are 5-20°C (41-68°F), you water the nematodes into the soil. They require damp conditions and you should keep soil moist for a week after application. Nemuslay is available by mail order (see box, below left) and from some garden centres. Since it is a living animal, it should be applied directly after purchase.
- Effectiveness The slug population can be reduced for at least six weeks. Snails are less susceptible because they usually live above soil level. Nematodes work best in light soils and may give disappointing results in heavy clay.
- Typical plants to protect Potatoes, other vegetables and plants becoming established.

NEMASLUG SUPPLIERS
- Agralan: 01285 860015; www.agralan.co.uk
- Biowise: 01795 862734; www.biowise-biocontrol.co.uk
- Defenders: 01233 813121; www.defenders.co.uk
- Green Gardener: 01493 750441; www.greengardener.co.uk
- Just Green: 01627 785068; www.just-green.com
- Ladybird Plantcare: 0845 094 5499; www.ladybirdplantcare.co.uk
- Organic Gardening: Catalogue: 01922 259666; www.organiccatalogue.co.uk

www.rhs.org.uk Search ‘Slugs’ at the RHS website for control product information.