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Column: Gary Bogue

UNFORTUNATELY, SNAIL BAIT POISONS MORE THAN SNAILS
GARY BOGUE, TIMES COLUMNIST

Dear Gary:

I was wondering if you could mention the dangers of snail bait poisoning in any upcoming columns. We would really like to get the word out there so people can protect their pets.

Recently, two dogs brought to our clinic (we've had several) were exposed (to bait) by the gardeners who left an open box of snail bait in the back yard -- the dogs ate most of it and became seriously and suddenly ill. It took keeping them under anesthesia for several hours to control their seizures. Fortunately, they made it!

I don't think some people realize how serious/fatal snail bait poisoning can be and how very little it takes to become toxic.

* It takes less than a teaspoon per 10 pounds of body weight to become toxic:

Snail bait commonly comes in pellets (resembles dog food).

Snail bait is flavored with molasses or bran to attract snails and, unfortunately, also attracts dogs.

Snail baits are also in liquids and powders that can be licked off paws during normal grooming.

* Signs of poisoning begin quickly:

Anxious twitching which becomes uncontrollable.

Twitching progresses to seizures -- and potentially death.

The muscle contractions of the twitches raise the body temperature so high that brain damage can result.

Patients can also exhibit racing heart rates, vomiting, diarrhea and respiratory failure.

Chance of recovery depends on how much poison was ingested, how quickly therapy was initiated and the general health of the patients.

* Pet-safe alternatives to snail baits include:

Sluggo Slug and Snail Bait.

Hand picking. If picked up on a regular/weekly basis, the population of snails can be significantly reduced.

Java for snails. A 1 percent to 2 percent caffeine solution can kill nearly all the slugs and snails within two days.

Coffee grounds are a great way to keep snails and slugs at bay.

Copper barriers. Copper reacts with the slime the snail secretes, causing a flow of electricity that repels them.

Tracey, **Bishop Ranch Veterinary Center**

Dear Tracey:

Thanks for the alert! I'm sure it will help save a lot of dogs. You're right, snail bait poisoning is pretty nasty.

Here's a snail/slug control program for hand pickers that has worked well for me in the past:

Snails come out at night or when it's overcast to feed, then crawl back under leaves and plants where it's cool and moist until it's time to eat again.

Spread a few old newspapers around on your lawn on ground areas of the garden and anywhere else where you usually see snails and slugs. When it's dry, soak the papers with a hose. The present rainstorms will take care of this job for you.

Your snails and slugs will start using these handy wet newspapers as hiding places. Every morning before work, harvest the many snails and slugs you'll find under the newspapers and dispose of them. After a week of this, the population will be down to almost nothing, and you can keep things under control with Sluggo and coffee grounds.

A FINAL NOTE

Ever since the Toni Ayers letter appeared in your column (March 1), I am sure you have been inundated with hummingbird names. Our resident guardian of the feeder has been named "Attila the Hum"! We have two four-perch feeders and the other evening at dusk there were eight hummers perched on the feeders with two waiting to belly up to the bar. What a great sight. (Pamela Walsh, cyberspace)

Find more Gary in his blog at: blogs.ContraCostaTimes.com/gary--bogue; write Gary, P.O. Box 8099, Walnut Creek, CA 94596-8099; old columns at ContraCostaTimes.com, click on Columnists; e-mail garybug@infionline.net