

Caution: Snail Bait Poisons More Than Just Snails
by
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This time of year when the weather becomes warmer and people are working in their yard, it is essential to consider the products you are using to rid your yard of those pesky snails and slugs. Some snail bait products, while effective at killing unwanted snails and slugs, are extremely lethal to pets.

There are two main types of snail baits, and one is considered relatively safe for dogs. Look for the active ingredient and use the kind that contains 1% Iron Phosphate. This is relatively safe for dogs, because there is actually very little iron in the compound, and what there is, is poorly digested and absorbed by dogs, so most of it passes through them without incident. That being said, Iron Phosphate can still be toxic dogs if they ingest enough of it: a 40 lb dog would have to consume about 3 lbs of this bait to receive a lethal dose of iron, although vomiting, diarrhea can occur with as little as about 1/10 of that amount.

However, there are other brands of snail bait that contain an active ingredient called Metaldehyde. Metaldehyde causes muscle tremors that progress to convulsions. Dogs can easily die from this poison, **as it only takes less than a teaspoon per 10lbs of body weight for snail bait to become toxic**. Each spring when the snails come out, we see numerous dogs at our practice that have ingested Metaldehyde that require emergency treatment, including iv fluids, injections of anti-seizure medication, and a one- or two-day hospital stay.

If you suspect any of your family pets have ingested snail bait, it is imperative they be seen by a veterinarian immediately because symptoms of poisoning can begin within 45 minutes of ingestion. Keep all potential poisons well out of reach of dogs.

Know the Facts:

- The toxic ingredient in snail bait is Metaldehyde.
- Snail bait constitutes the most common poisoning agent in dogs in California.
- Snail bait is commonly in pellets and resembles dog food.
- Snail bait is flavored with molasses or bran to attract snails, and unfortunately also attracts dogs.
- Snail baits are also in liquid and powder forms that can be licked off paws during normal grooming.
- It only takes less than a teaspoon per 10lbs of body weight for snail bait to become toxic

Signs of poisoning begin quickly:

- Anxious twitching which becomes uncontrollable
- Twitching progresses to seizures and potentially death
- The muscle contractions of the twitches raise body temperature so high that brain damage can result.

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

There is no direct antidote for metaldehyde toxicity; treatment is aimed at controlling the tremors and seizures with IV fluids and muscle relaxants until the poison has been cleared from the system. Chance of recovery depends on how much poison was ingested, how quickly therapy was initiated and the general health of the dog.

Pet Safe Alternatives to Snail Baits include:

- Sluggo Slug and Snail Bait. The active ingredient in the safe product is Iron Phosphate.
- Handpicking - picked on a regular/weekly basis the population of snails significantly can be reduced
- Java for Snails - a 1-2 percent caffeine solution can kill nearly all the slugs and snails in your garden within two days. Coffee grounds are a great way to keep snails and slugs away.
- Copper barriers -- copper reacts with the slime the snail secretes, causing a flow of electricity.