

Spring and Slug Bait

By Dr. Teri Weronko



Her name was Bella, and on any other day she was a spectacularly beautiful blue merle Australian Sheepdog. Here in the Northwest, in the springtime, a case like this was almost certainly slug bait poisoning.

The dog they carried into the back of the hospital was in full tetanic rigidity. Legs splayed out, whole frame convulsing, white thick froth caking her muzzle, her temperature greater than a baking hot 106 degrees...a full 4 degrees above normal! Her name was Bella, and on any other day she was a spectacularly beautiful blue merle Australian Sheepdog. Here in the Northwest, in the springtime, a case like this was almost certainly slug bait poisoning.

Slug and snail baits contain the toxin metaldehyde. This poison causes convulsive uncontrollable muscle shaking, which turns into full convulsions within a few hours of ingestion by mammals. The convulsions lead to hyperthermia...or over heating, and death by heat stroke and brain swelling if untreated. It is not a pretty way to go.

The treatment is very effective, saving almost 100% of cases if started in time. We use anti seizure medications and muscle relaxants and treat for the shock and heat stroke with intravenous fluids, cooling and sometimes steroids for cerebral edema. The body will metabolize the toxic chemical in about 24 hours, so this is typically how long the animal needs to stay under close observation at an emergency hospital. Often multiple rounds of drugs are needed to keep the seizures under control that first night. Dogs and cats have been known to be poisoned, but we rarely see cats in the ER with this condition. It is thought that they cannot make it home once muscle fasciculations begin.

And slug bait is delicious! Once a dog gets into it, they will often immediately return for more when they get home. They do not equate the snack they had a day and a half ago with the horrible night in the emergency room.

All forms of bait that contain metaldehyde are extremely toxic in small quantities. I have seen dogs ingest soil that the liquid Deadline has been applied to. On the rare once or twice a year occasion I use these products here at the animal hospital, I use it sparingly, fence the areas I apply it to, and ban all dogs and cats in that area of the yard for several weeks and/or rain cycles. Even with these precautions I would never leave my dog unattended outside in a yard that has been baited. I have seen far too many break ins in my career!

What is safe for pets



To be truly safe do not use metaldehyde at all. **Sluggo** is a slug deterrent containing the relatively non toxic substance iron phosphide is safe for pets, and they aren't inclined to eat it. It doesn't work as well as toxic bait for sure, but it IS enough to get you through that crazy slug throng that happens in the spring. And there are all those others slug methods we are famous for in the northwest...beer bowls, copper, scissors and flashlights. What would gardening be here without these tried and true efforts?

Bella did well and was recovered by the next day. Then, true to form, she went home, broke back into the greenhouse where the bait was being stored, and ate it AGAIN! Back to the hospital she came for round two of treatments, from which she also recovered well. Mom and dad went home and padlocked the greenhouse! ♦

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