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Dogs eat snail bait, live to tell tale

Vets find increased poisonings as owners tackle garden pests

by [Dolores Fox Ciardelli](#)

Pam Fulmer was upstairs at her Alamo home on a recent late Saturday afternoon and happened to glance out the window toward her yard. What she saw stopped her cold: Her black lab Lucy was having convulsions.

"I went racing down the stairs, I couldn't figure out what had happened," Fulmer recalled. "I thought maybe she'd somehow broken a limb, she seemed to keep falling, or got something caught in her throat and couldn't breathe. ... I rounded the deck, and there I found my other dog, Rosie, spread out, also having convulsions." Then she realized it must be poisoning.

The gardeners had just applied Corry's Slug and Snail Death to the garden. "It was kind of a mistake it even got here, it was a huge mix-up," said Fulmer. "Then they just left the box in the back yard where the dogs were."

Fulmer and her partner, Marcela Davison, rushed Lucy and Rosie, a Boston terrier, to the Bishop Ranch Veterinary Center because they saw in the phone book it has weekend emergency hours. Technicians met them with a stretcher and raced both dogs to the back where veterinarian Melanie Ellis got to work.

"The first thing to do is to stop the seizing," said Dr. Ellis. "We treat them with muscle relaxants. Every nerve and muscle can be affected."

She said they also immediately tried to get the poison out of their bodies and worked to cool them down.

"Convulsions cause the body temperature to rise dramatically and very quickly so it can cause brain damage," Ellis explained.

The seizures continued to the point where they administered general anesthesia to the dogs for three hours to halt them, meanwhile monitoring them for liver failure.

"These were probably the worst poisoning cases with snail bait that many of us had seen," said Ellis. "They didn't respond as we'd hoped but we tried to stabilize them as best we could."

Ellis herself stayed until 5 the next morning. "If somebody has to make difficult decisions, it's good to have a doctor there," she said.

"Dr. Ellis was great," said Fulmer, calling with frequent updates after they went home. The Sunday doctor, James DeLano, was just as good, allowing them to sit in the back with their dogs, on Super bowl Sunday, she added.

The veterinary center sent out a press release last week warning that it has had an unusual number of animals poisoned from snail bait. Fulmer noted that the Corry's snail bait said in big lettering "safe for vegetable gardens" and warned in smaller print that it could endanger animals and young children. Snail bait is often flavored with molasses or bran, which attracts dogs.

Ellis said even a little snail bait can be dangerous. She saw another dog exhibited symptoms after just licking it off his paws. She said she shudders when she sees all the signs in gardening centers telling people not to forget their snail bait. Pet-safe alternatives are Sluggo Slug and Snail Bait; picking the snails on a regular weekly basis; coffee grounds or a 1-2 percent solution, which can kill nearly all the slugs and snails in a garden within two days; or a copper barrier, which reacts with the excreted slime, causing a flow of electricity.

Lucy and Rosie went home that Tuesday, and subsequent checkups showed they are doing fine. Their owners are grateful to the vet center and glad they were home that day. And they say from now on, they will pick off the snails by hand