Acanthus (Bear's Breeches)

Pest Problems

Slugs and Snails

These pests are readily recognizable by just about everyone who sees them. Since they are nocturnal creatures and feed mostly at night, they are difficult to catch in the act. Slugs are basically snails without shells and have rasping mouthparts that cause holes in the foliage. A slug or snail moves on a layer of slime excreted from its body. The Spotted Garden Slug (*Limax maximus)* and the Greenhouse Slug (*Milax gagates*) feed on the foliage of Bear's Breeches.

Signs of infestation

Acanthus is a very tough plant that has relatively few pests, with the exception of slugs and snails, which cause chewing injury to the foliage. In early morning or during periods of cloud cover, a slime trail may be found.

Monitoring

Look for holes in foliage. Slime trails will be evident in early morning hours. Look under leaf litter or rocks for presence of slugs during the daytime. Slugs and snails generally stay within a short distance of their feeding sites. Eggs are laid under rocks and leaf litter .

Control

Toads are natural predators of slugs. The larvae of several species of lightening bugs also feed on slugs. Feeding stations can be constructed using a small can or jar cover. Dice an apple or grapes and place under the can cover. Slugs will be attracted to this feeding site where they can be physically destroyed by the gardener. Slug baits containing registered chemicals also can be placed under the can cover. Slugs are attracted to yeast odors. Placing a small amount of yeast or spoiled beer in a can that is sunk to ground level will serve as an attractant trap. The slugs fall into and drown in the can, so it must be cleaned out regularly and the yeast or beer replaced.

Disease Problems

Root Knot Nematodes

Nematodes are tiny, unsegmented worms. Many are microscopic and cannot be seen with the naked eye—or even a hand lens. The most common root-infesting nematode is the Root Knot Nematode, including several species in the genus *Meloidogyne*.

Symptom

Root Knot Nematodes enter the root as tiny larvae and cause swellings (root knots) that can easily be seen. Root swellings are composed of firm, white plant tissue in which the nematode body is embedded, resembling a tiny pearl . Above ground injury produced by Root Knot Nematodes range from stunting and wilting to death of the plant.
(Pictures to the right show Root Knot Nematode injury on Bear's Breeches)

Monitoring

Look for conspicuous lumps to small, inconspicuous root swellings. If in doubt about root swellings or lumps on roots, submit a sample to a laboratory for confirmation. Infected roots are often subject to decay and soft rot as the growing season progresses.

Control

Destroy infested plants. Do not plant root knot susceptible plants back in the same bed for several years.