

# Act now to control slugs in corn

NEWARK, Del. — Farmers in some parts of northern Delaware have had trouble with slugs in emerging no-till corn the past few years. "Last spring was the worst yet for slug damage to early no-till corn," says University of Delaware extension agent Dean Belt. A mild winter and extremely wet, cool spring made the problem more severe than usual. A drier, more normal season reduces the chance for injury because corn grows faster and soon gets beyond the 6-inch height which generally seems to be the pest's upper feeding limit.

Certain fall cultural practices can reduce slug infestations, the New Castle County agent says. Some spring cultural practices will also help.

Belt has worked closely with extension entomologists in trying to find ways to solve the slug problem — especially for growers who want to use no-tillage. The scientists say slow growing corn is subject to the most severe injury.

"Farmers with fields that suffered slug damage this year must decide whether to select cropping practices to reduce potential injury next spring, or take the chance on more normal growing conditions and then treat if slugs

do attack their corn," Belt says.

Crop rotation is the most effective way to break the slug cycle. For this reason, he suggests planting soybeans in fields where slugs are numerous. Soil surfaces are usually drier when this crop goes in, so it should be less susceptible to injury.

In the fall, he says growers who wish to control slugs should use one of three cultural options:

1 - Plow, chisel plow or disc before planting a cover crop to bury trash that might favor slugs.

2 - Disc or chisel to spread trash and reduce the cover where slugs live, except on critical slopes where erosion is a problem.

3 - For no-till, mow or shred stalks very close to the ground to help spread plant trash more evenly and hasten its decomposition.

In the spring, Belt says it is important to scout fields early for signs of slug activity. Pay special attention to any PIK acres which have a heavy cover.

It may be better to plow, chisel plow or disc no-till fields having severe slug infestations this year, to bury the cover and thus remove places where slugs can hid during the day. This also would allow the soil to dry more quickly and

discourage them further. Of course, this practice would reduce a major benefit of no-till — erosion control on rolling land or slopes.

When planting no-till it's very important to close the seed furrow — again, so slugs will have fewer places to hide. For this reason, Belt recommends using cast iron press wheels when possible.

In the past, farmers have had difficulty controlling slug outbreaks with chemicals. Extension entomologist Mark Graustein and pest management specialist Joanne Whalen tested several pesticides last spring and say some looked very good. Belt says their work will continue. He urges growers to check fields carefully as soon as corn emerges for signs of slug damages so timely action can be taken if needed.

The Delaware Cooperative Extension Service will hold field meetings next spring to help farmers evaluate the slug problem, decide when to treat, and determine materials to use. Belt encourages anyone not already on the New Castle or Kent County mailing lists to contact their county extension office so that they can receive notification of these meetings.

In the meantime, farmers can hope slugs won't be so bad in 1984. "If we have a hard winter and a dry spring, maybe the problem won't be with us," Belt says. "But

nobody can guarantee that will happen, so it will pay growers to stay on top of the situation by doing everything they can do to discourage slugs."

## It's black walnut gathering time

NEWARK, Del. — Nuts are costly at the market, but right now black walnuts are free for the taking. The black walnut tree (*Juglans nigra*) is a Delaware native, and its sweet-tasting nuts can be found along roadways all over the state. Gathering them is a good excuse for an outing on a crisp fall day.

Lying on the ground, black walnuts resemble small green tennis balls. They grow in clusters, and have a peculiar odor, says University of Delaware extension horticulturist Dave Tatnall. It would be hard to mistake them for anything else, with the possible exception of horsechestnuts. To avoid confusion (since horsechestnuts are slightly poisonous) remember that black walnut hulls are rounder and harder to break open. Inside their hulls, hor-

sechestnuts are shiny and smooth like chestnuts, but black walnuts look more like commercial walnuts, although darker and more deeply grooved. The characteristic walnut odor is the final giveaway.

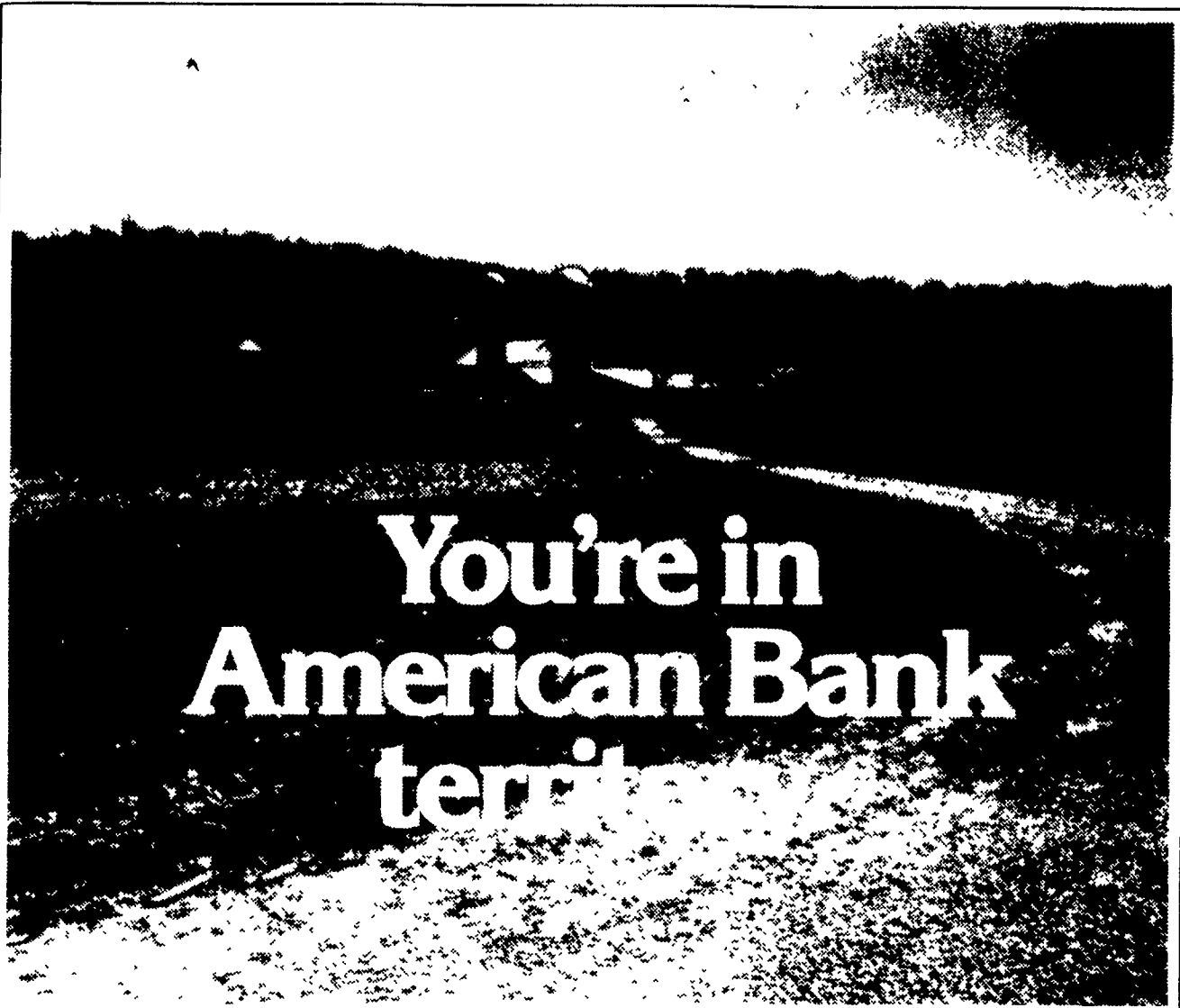
Once you've located and identified some black walnuts, gather them promptly after they fall while the hulls are still fresh and green. If the hulls are left on too long the kernels discolor and develop a strong flavor, Tatnall says.

Mash and remove the hulls by hand, using a heavy mallet, sledge or similar tool. It's best to wear rubber or disposable plastic gloves and old clothes while hulling walnuts, because the juice in the husks contains a stain that's hard to remove.

After hulling, wash the walnuts to remove any remaining juice and bits of husk. Then spread them out in their shells on a table or in shallow containers in a cool, airy place such as a screened porch or garage. There should be no strong odors present which the nuts could absorb. Drying and curing will take three or four weeks, Tatnall says.

Store the cured walnuts in their shells in a cool, dry place until you are ready to shell them for cooking or eating. Shelling is easier if you first soak them in water for several hours, then keep them moist overnight in a closed container. Shelled nuts can be stored in polyethylene bags in the freezer where they'll be ready to add interest to holiday snacks and baked goods.

Serious black walnut fanciers who don't want to search for their favorite treat should plant the "Thomas" variety. Its many advantages include early and heavy bearing, large, thin-shelled nuts that crack easily, and plump, light-colored kernels of good flavor. Tatnall says a vigorous "Thomas" walnut tree may begin to bear the second or third year after planting.



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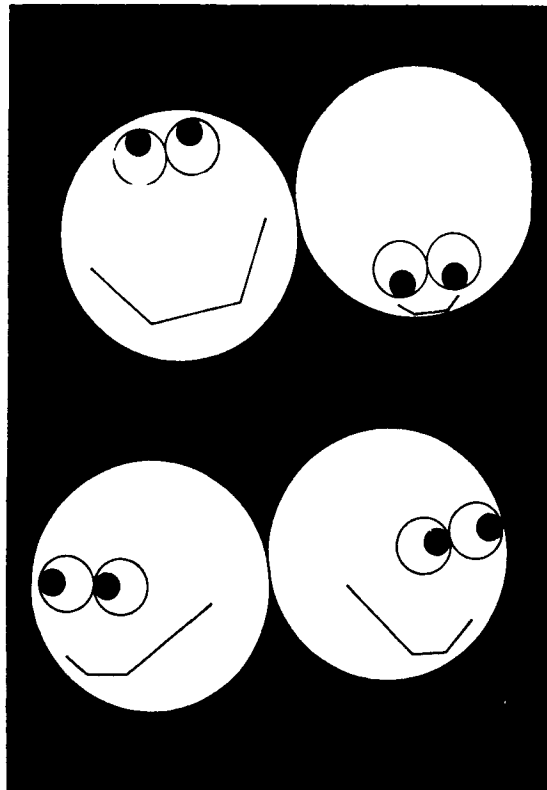
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