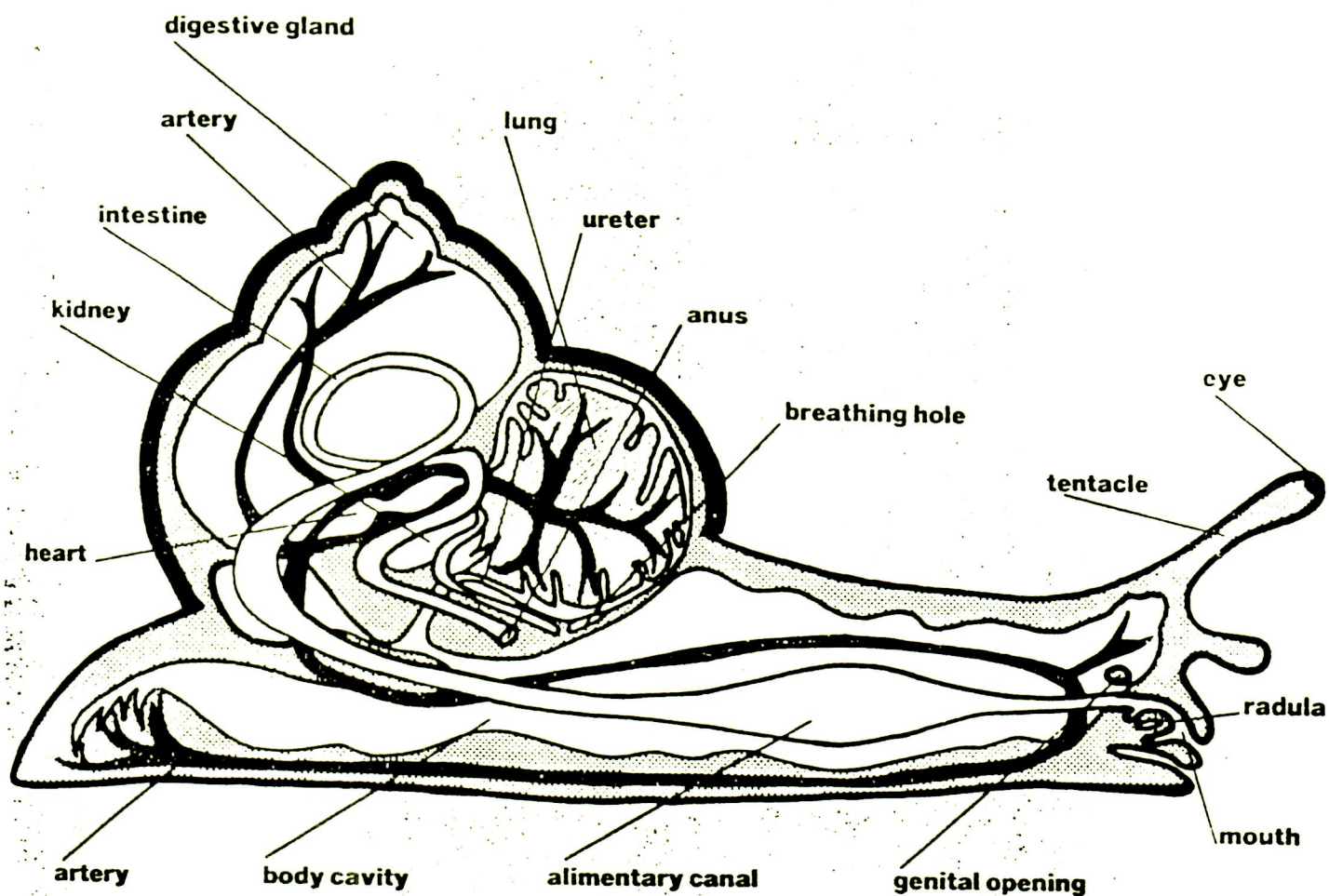


DEKALB 4-H SNAIL CARE MANUAL



Snails are fascinating creatures! They are easy to care for and they can perform feats you wouldn't think possible. Once you have observed them for a while, you'll never again say "YUCK!" when you see a snail in the garden.

HANDLING

Use great care whenever you pick up a snail. Snails are more delicate than you might think. The shells are thin - just a fall from your hand to the floor can smash it badly. The snail will secrete a repair fluid around the injury but it will remain forever a weak spot.

When snails are resting, they attach themselves to the top or sides of their home. Their body will be drawn back into the shell and no movement can be observed. To "wake up" a snail, squirt a little warm water (not hot), in the shell opening. Hold the snail in your hand or place it on a warm (not hot) window sill to raise its body temperature. You will soon see the snail's eyes, feelers and foot emerge from the shell.

When a snail is crawling on a flat surface, gently tug on it to lift it up. The snail foot acts like a small suction cup. If you pull very hard, you could rip the snail's body out of its shell and kill it.

HOUSING

Snails can live in any tightly closed container as long as they get light and air. A small aquarium is great but it must have a lid.

You can make a great home for one or two snails from an empty, one or two liter soft drink bottle. Use a pair of sharp scissors to cut around the bottle just above the label. A wide mouthed glass jar could also be used. Clean it thoroughly and put a piece of thin cloth over the opening. Use a heavy rubber band to keep the covering on tight.

Line the bottom of your snail home with moss. You can collect moss from wet places near your home.

LOCATION

Place your snail home where it can get good light but never in a window or in direct sunlight. The bright sunlight can raise the temperature inside a container and cook the snails. Good places are on a table near the window or under fluorescent lights.

FOOD

Snails eat many kinds of plants. Your snails will be perfectly happy eating lettuce leaves. Place a single leaf in your snail house and observe how many days it takes for it to be eaten. If it is all gone in one day, put in two leaves at a time. Feed only fresh lettuce leaves. Do not allow limp lettuce to stay in the snail house. You could also try an apple slice or a few flakes of oatmeal. Snails need calcium to strengthen their shell. Place a piece of egg shell in the snail house for your snail to nibble on.

WATER

Snails need water to form the slime that they crawl on. Use a trigger operated spray bottle to mist your habitat every day or two. It needs to be damp inside but never soggy.

BODY PARTS

Snails have several parts of their body that are similar to ours. Snail eyes are at the tips of the top set of feelers. The organs of smell and touch are at the tips of the lower feelers.

If you watch a snail from underneath as it crawls up a piece of clear plastic, the mouth can be seen. It is the round opening below the lower set of feelers. The mouth has a "tongue", called a radula, that tears its food into tiny pieces.

DON'T RELEASE

Because snails eat garden plants, they can become a serious pest. Many mistakes have been made by people releasing "harmless" living things...which later become pests. Kudzu is an excellent example of this kind of mistake.

Never, ever, release your snails outdoors. If you can not care for them, call the DeKalb 4-H snail office (936-5455) and arrange to bring them to us.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

You can get excellent books on snails from the DeKalb Library system. Look in the non-fiction area, in section 594.3.

In an encyclopedia, look under "snails" or "mollusks" for information on all kinds of snails.