

One scavenger that can be found in any ornamental garden pool is the snail. The old saying makes claims that they help to keep the pools clean and tidy. Another "old" idea is that the snail helps to keep water staying "sweet." I'm afraid I would question all of the claims just a bit. Snails do eat some algae and fish offal, scraps of food, and the dead fish that may sink, unnoticed, to the pool bottom.

Snails can help us understand what is going on in the pool, primarily the health of the pool. Snails are a living meter that most often will react to drastic chemical changes taking place in the pool. The water becoming slightly acidic will cause the snails' shells to become pitted and scored, though healthy for the fish. This is a general indication the pool is healthy, although extremely-acidic water is dangerous to fish and will kill the snails.

Snails clinging to the surface rim of the pool for as long as a day may mean the water is out of balance. If, in checking the water, you find it is foul, change it. Should the water be clear and have no odor, the snails could be objecting to an exceptionally-high oxygen content or high acidity. Neither will be dangerous to the fish.

Now, just a few tidbits about snails. Snails are a shell-bearing gastropod mollusk living in sea and fresh water, and some even on land. The majority belong to two orders, *Pulmonata* and *Prosobranchiata*. The majority of land and fresh water snails are hermaphrodites; in sea snails, the sexes are often separated. In general, most snails lay eggs but, in certain species, the young are born alive. Snails can be anywhere from a 16th of an inch to two feet in length. What we are writing about here are the general pool snails and, so, no two-footers.

## Species and Varieties

**African Paper Shell Snail** - This is a pretty formed snail of medium size, somewhat flattened shape, with attractive brown markings on a horn-colored background. One of the better ones, this one is a good scavenger and one that won't attach to aquatic plants. For those wishing to breed snails, include this one, as it is quite useful. Every time the pool is cleaned, empty shells will be found of this species, for it is comparatively short-lived.

**Australian Red Snail** - One of the smaller species with a conch-shaped shell, bright orange-red. Very useful, of average hardiness, and reproduces in the pool without special conditions.

**Japanese Snail** - Also called Great Japanese Snail or Trapdoor Snail. One of the largest and best scavengers, it often grows to the size of a golf ball, is very hardy and has a long life. The pea-sized progeny are born alive, too big for fish to eat.



**Potomac Snail** - Resembles the Japanese Snail, except for three brown stripes running parallel to the spiral of the shell. It is sometimes sold as the Japanese Snail, but is far inferior. Practically inactive, and does little good.

**Limpet** - Small snail about the size of a match head, with flat semi-transparent shell, rather attractive. Turns up occasion-

ally in pools and sometimes in considerable numbers, having apparently gotten there as a stowaway on some newly-purchased aquatic plant. This one is not only harmless but useless.

**Pond Snail** - This small snail is about as large as the end of a little finger. Easily identified because the spiral of the shell is the reverse of most other snails, it might be called "the snail with the left-hand thread." Breeds prolifically, and the hard shells of the very young protect them from fish. Called the best of all the scavengers, it is a busy and thorough feeder. The small size enables it to move easily among the more slender plant stems in search of algae, feeding locations for which other snails are usually too large and too heavy.



**Red Ramshorn** - Also called Coral Snail, or Copenhagen Red Snail. An excellent scavenger with a large, flattened, orange-red shell shaped like the horn for which it is named. Does quite well in pools, where it can be seen. Considered the most handsome snail.



**Black Ramshorn** - Black-shelled, medium sized snail, similar in shape to the Red Ramshorn and just as good a scavenger. Common in European water gardens but scarce in the United States.



**White Ramshorn** - Similar to the Black Ramshorn, but with a white shell. Common in Europe, but rare in the United States.

On the average, snails are seldom culprits in eating the aquatic plant life in the pools. Many, at times, may be seen feeding on the edge of a leaf or pad that has started to die away. This is normal and one of their given jobs by the creator. BUT, some snails will get carried away with the job and some will attack the plants and this will have to be brought under control in a hurry.

The snail, *Lymnaea stagnolis* (Giant Pond Snail. It is thin shelled to 2.5 inches and has a very pointed shell end), by all means needs to be avoided. It will feed on and eat away aquatic plants rather quickly.

Should the snail population get carried away, and it will, floating lettuce leaves and other soft plant materials on the water's surface will attract them and one can then lift them out and dispose of them. Watch for flat jelly-like strips on pots and plants. Keep as many of these eggs cleaned from the plants as possible.

Clean all new plants of eggs before placing in the pond. I have, at times, found eggs so

thick on a plant's parts that the whole thing needed to be disposed of. Nip the pad at the base of the petiole (stem) and, if on the peduncle or flower, treat the same. Any part of either will only remain on the plant base and rot. Try to avoid dead plant material in the pool when possible.

To clean the plants of snail eggs, use the thumb nail and gently slide or push under the jelly-like material holding the eggs, detaching it, then throwing it away. Once plants and pools are established, snails, for the most part, can be tolerated. To a point!

**Sources:**

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# Snails: Scavengers of the Pool

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