

## **Gardening Tips**

### **Toad Hotels**

**By John Ferguson**

Since we have been discussing insect problems associated with mulches it seems time to talk about natural controls.

One of the best insect control methods is toad frogs as they love to eat slugs and snails, crickets, grasshoppers, pill bugs, flies, etc. Like all animals they need food, water, and shelter. To ensure I have a good population of toad frogs I build them shelter and provide water.

For shelter I have found several ways that work and are essentially free. Toads like cool, moist, dark places to hide and sleep in during the day, hence I provide this for them.

Method 1: Often the clay trays that pots sit in for watering become damaged, so I use them for toad hotels. I will use a hammer and chip a hole 1-2 inches wide in the collar, turn it over and set it under a low growing shrub and then cover with mulch leaving only the opening exposed. The smaller 6-8 inch diameter trays that are 1-2 inches deep seem to work best.

Method 2: I will use a couple of old bricks (or old stone pieces 1-2 inches thick), and place them 3-6 inches apart under a shrub. Cover with a small piece of wood, old license plate, etc. and then cover with mulch.

Method 3: One can use a small log where the center had rotted out and place on the ground under the shrubs. One can also make a shelter by taking a small log and drilling a 1-2 inch diameter hole in the middle of the log and parallel to the length of the log.



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I use all these in my garden and the toads seem to love them. I remember one year I was sitting on the ground in the late evening. I heard a slight rustling sound in the leaves and looked over. There was a parade of toads leaving their shelter and marching out to feed on garden pests.

Note: For water I have a waterfall and pond. In addition I use several of the clay flower pot trays 8-12 inch diameter as water bowels for birds and other wildlife. I scattered them around the garden. I have seen toad frogs, tree frogs, and even a ribbon snake in addition to birds using them. I like to use the clay trays as they will dry out in 5-6 days so one does not have to worry about mosquitoes using it for breeding.