

# Pest Alert

## Giant African Snails

“Giant African snail” is the common name used to describe several foreign snail species that could become serious agricultural pests in the United States. The most important giant African snail is *Lissachatina fulica* (formerly *Achatina fulica*).

### The Giant African Snail

Scientists consider *L. fulica* to be one of the most damaging land snails in the world. It is known to feed on at least 500 different types of plants, including peanuts, beans, peas, cucumbers, and melons. If fruits and vegetables are not available, they will eat a wide variety of ornamental plants, tree bark, and even paint and stucco on houses.

*L. fulica* is established throughout the Indo-Pacific basin, from east Africa to Hawaii and Guam, including the Southern Asian region. This mollusk has been introduced to several Caribbean islands including Anguilla, Antigua, Aruba, Barbados, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Guadeloupe, Lesser Antilles, Marie-Galante, Martinique, Saint Lucia, Saint Martin, and Trinidad. It is also widespread in several South American countries and, in 2016, was reported in Spain for the first time.



Figure 1. A mature *Lissachatina fulica* maneuvers in its environment.



Figure 2. A penny is used to show the size of giant African snail eggs.

### Florida and the Giant African Snail

In 1966, a Miami, FL, boy smuggled three giant African snails into South Florida upon returning from a trip to Hawaii. His grandmother eventually released the snails into her garden. Seven years later, more than 18,000 adult snails were found, along with thousands of eggs. It took 10 years and cost \$1 million to eradicate the pest in Florida.

In September 2011, a resident of Miami found a snail and contacted the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer

Services. This action resulted in the State’s second giant African snail detection. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Florida have invested several million dollars since this second detection, and work continues today to eradicate this pest.

### Description/Life Cycle

Reaching almost 8 inches (20 centimeters) in length and 5 inches (13 centimeters) in diameter, *L. fulica* is one of the world’s largest land snails—about the size of an average adult fist. When fully grown, its shell consists of seven to nine whorls, with a long and greatly swollen body whorl. The brownish shell with darker brown lengthwise stripes covers at least half the length of the snail.

Each snail contains both female and male reproductive organs. After a single mating, each snail can produce 100 to 500 eggs. These snails can reproduce several more times without mating again. They can generate clutches of eggs every 2 to 3 months.

Although this species thrives in tropical and subtropical areas, it can survive in cold conditions. In winter in the Northern United States, the snail would become slow and sluggish, almost hibernating until warmer weather returned.



**Figure 3.** Giant African snail infestation on the Caribbean island of Saint Lucia.



**Figure 4.** Shell of an immature giant African snail.



**Figure 5.** USDA technician holds giant African snail shells found during a pest survey.

## Distribution

Like other invasive pests and diseases, giant African snails can hitchhike into the United States on imported cargo. People are also known to bring snails into the country illegally to keep as classroom exhibits or pets or to use as food or for ceremonial purposes.

## Damage

Giant African snails cause extensive damage to crops and plants in tropical and subtropical areas. These snails are also known to carry organisms that can cause diseases in humans and livestock. People can get

sick from ingesting improperly cooked snail meat or by handling live snails and then touching their eyes, nose, or mouth.

## Control

Because of the potential damage these snails can cause, they are illegal in the United States. If you have a giant African snail, do not release it into the environment or give it away. Instead, immediately report it to your State department of agriculture or to the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) office in your State. For a list of APHIS offices, go to [www.aphis.usda.gov/planthealth/sphd](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/planthealth/sphd).

## Learn More

For more information on giant African snails, visit the APHIS website at [www.aphis.usda.gov/plant-health/gas](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/plant-health/gas).

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