

# More than 1,000 invasive giant African snails captured in Florida

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Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

Agriculture officials say they've captured more than 1,000 giant African

land snails from Pasco County since the invasive pest—"one of the most damaging snails in the world"—was first detected around New Port Richey in late June.

"Let me assure you: We will eradicate these snails," Florida Agriculture Commissioner Nikki Fried told reporters at a news conference Thursday.

The snails can grow to 8 inches long and consume hundreds of kinds of plants. They also pose a health threat to anyone who comes into contact with them.

They've been found on 29 properties, officials said. About 900 have been collected alive, while nearly 150 were dead. Agriculture officials said the main place they've found the snails so far is around Massachusetts Avenue in New Port Richey.

State officials have set up a "quarantine" area from the northwest corner of the U.S. 19 and Ridge Road intersection, east to Little Road, and south to Trouble Creek Road.

They warn residents not to move the [giant snails](#) or any plants, soil, compost and yard waste from the zone without a compliance agreement from the [agriculture department](#).

Crews are putting down snail bait at properties near the sighting—basically a pesticide for catching and killing snails.

The largest snail found so far in Pasco was 4.5 inches. A single giant African land snail can lay more than 2,500 eggs in a year, according to the state.

In addition to eating plants, they may munch on plaster or stucco to get

calcium to harden their shells.

Most troubling, the snails can carry rat lungworm, which is known to cause meningitis. So far, rat lungworm has not been found in any of the captured snails, said Greg Hodges, assistant director of the state [agriculture](#) department's Division of Plant Industry.

Giant African land snails have plagued Florida twice before, both times around Miami-Dade County. Eradicating them can take years.

Last time, it took about a decade and \$23 million to remove the snails, according to the state. The pests were declared eradicated only last year.

The Pasco snails look different than those that proliferated in South Florida, Hodges said. They have a light, cream-colored body and dark shells. In South Florida, they had dark gray or brown bodies.

Their appearance is similar to snails popular in the pet trade in Europe, he said. Some such snails have been intercepted in Florida before, Hodges said, but officials have not yet determined how they got into Pasco.

It is illegal to have the snails as pets here without a permit, he said.

Fried warned people not to touch the [snails](#) and to call the department if they believe they spot some.

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