

# SLIME NEWS

All the ooze that's fit to print!

## SLIMES FROM OUTER SPACE?

In 1973, people living in Garland, Texas discovered slimy yellow blobs in their yards. They also spotted a big blob creeping up a telephone pole. No one knew what the blobs were, but they guessed that what looked like creeping “dog vomit” couldn't be good. So they called the fire department to come and get rid of them.



SPACE ALIEN OR DOG VOMIT SLIME?

Firemen rushed to the neighborhood to hose down the slimy intruders, but it did no good. The blob on the pole climbed higher and grew bigger. The blobs in the yards also grew, and they got slimier. That surprised people and they began to be afraid. They were convinced that the blobs were from outer space, and they

began to talk about calling in the National Guard to destroy them.

Meanwhile, a cool-headed scientist read about the blobs in a newspaper report. He was a mycologist (my-CALL-uh-gist, a scientist who studies fungi). He was curious, so he dropped by to take a look.

In no time, he identified the aliens as large scrambled-egg slimes, a native to local garden mulch. A little embarrassed, the neighborhood quickly calmed down and canceled the call to the National Guard. A few days later, all the slimes went quietly away.

Sources: [www.handsontheland.org](http://www.handsontheland.org) accessed June 5, 2006; [www.dnr.state.mn.us/volunteer/janfeb02/slimemolds.html](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/volunteer/janfeb02/slimemolds.html) accessed March 24, 2005.

## UNIQUE ON EARTH

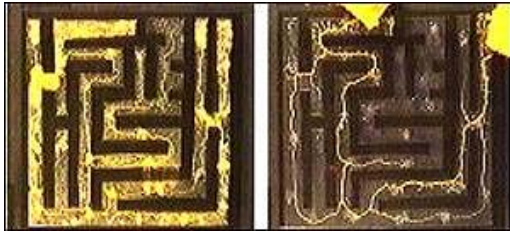
Although slime is like animals, plants and fungi in some ways, in other important ways it is unique. Scientists today think that slime may be the only member of a new category—a one-of-a-kind living thing with no near relatives.



ONE-OF-A-KIND!

## AMAZINGLY SMART SLIME

It's hard to believe that a critter without a brain, eyes, ears, or fingers could be even a little smart. But Japanese scientists have shown that slime has at least one



SLIME IN A MAZE

kind of intelligence. They have been testing slime in a maze to observe how it finds food. Does it grow and move in all directions, finding food by accident, or can it sense food from a distance?

The results of the experiment, which they have tried many times, show that slime always takes the shortest path. Somehow it senses food hidden in the maze and finds the way to it without making wrong turns.

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Source: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/944790.stm> accessed June 5, 2006.

## SLIME PREDATORS GET IMPORTANT NAMES

Scientists recently named 65 newly identified species of slime beetle—all major predators on oozing slime. Three of the species are now officially listed as

*Agathidium bushi*, *A cheneyi*, and *A rumsfeldi*, after President George W. Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney, and Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld. A fourth slime was named *A vaderi*, after Darth Vader, Dark Lord of the Sith, villain of the first *Star Wars* trilogy.



SLIME BEETLE

Source: *Santa Fe New Mexican* April 14, 2005.

## COUNT TO 20,000

When a slime is ready to reproduce, it makes fruiting bodies, called *sporangia* (spore-AN-gee-uh) by stacking thousands of spores together in clumps at the ends of tiny stems. Scientists are studying one kind of slime to discover how it knows when enough spores are stacked into each sporangium.



SPORES STACKED  
IN A SPORANGIUM  
= MAGNIFIED  
A LOT! =

The scientists have discovered a protein in slime that they call *countin* (COUNT-in). When they remove countin from test slimes, either not enough spores or too many spores stack up together into a fruiting body. When there are too many, the fruiting body breaks and collapses.

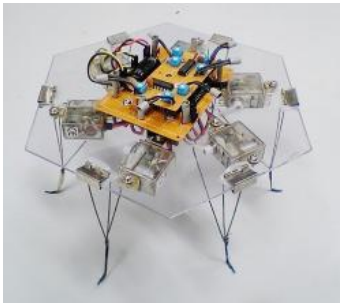
. . .continued

Somehow, the countin makes it possible for each spore to know how many others are around it. When they reach the right number (about 20,000), the spores stop clumping into the fruiting body.

Source: Science News July 24, 1999, at [www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m1200/is\\_4\\_156/ai\\_5555308/](http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1200/is_4_156/ai_5555308/) print accessed June 5, 2006.

## SLIME-BOT

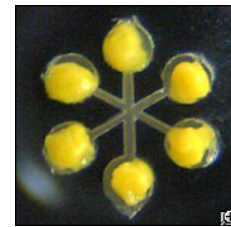
English and Japanese scientists have invented a robot controlled by oozing slime.



**SIX-LEGGED ROBOT**

They built a small robot with six legs and hooked it up to a computer that is hooked to a slime. When they shine a light on the robot, the computer shines another light on a part of the slime.

The slime always moves away from light, and when it does its motion sends a signal back to the robot. The signal causes the robot to move away from light.



**SLIME BRAIN**

In this set-up, the slime is like a simple brain, moving the robot body. The scientists hope that their research is a step towards robots with “living brains” made of slime, mold, and bacteria.

Sources: [www.newscientist.com/article.ns?id=dn8718](http://www.newscientist.com/article.ns?id=dn8718) accessed June 5, 2006; Tsuda, S. et al. “Robot Control: From Silicon Circuitry to Cells,” at <http://eprints.ecs.soton.ac.uk/11749/> accessed June 6, 2006.

## AND NOW SOME LINKS TO MORE OOZING SLIME NEWS

**What is that Thing: Slime Molds**

<http://www.handsontheland.org/monitoring/projects/slimemolds/slimemolds.cfm>

**Dark Beetle of the Sith**

[www.starwars.com/kids/explore/reallife/f20060202](http://www.starwars.com/kids/explore/reallife/f20060202)

**Slime Mould**

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slime\\_mold](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slime_mold)

**Buy Sclerotium to Explore Slime**

<http://www.earthsbirthdaystore.org/products.asp?dept=9>

## CREDITS

Dog vomit slime, © Rob & Ann Simpson/Visuals Unlimited | Orange slime © Steve McBill/BigStockPhoto.com | Slime in a maze from Bio-mimetic Control Center, Nagoya, Japan at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/944790.stm> June 5, 2006 | Slime beetle drawing by Francis Fawcett, Ithaca, NY, courtesy Cornell University | Fruiting body <http://dictyworkbench.sdsc.edu/> June 5, 2006 | Robot and slime circuit Klaus-Peter Zauner at [www.newscientist.com/article.ns?id=dn8718](http://www.newscientist.com/article.ns?id=dn8718) June 5, 2006

## OOZING SLIME NEWS: READER'S GUIDE

Circle the letter next to the correct answer.

1. What surprised a neighborhood in Garland, Texas?  
**A** space aliens   **B** dog vomit   **C** scrambled-egg slimes
2. Three new slime beetles are named for important  
**A** U.S. leaders   **B** TV stars   **C** Siths   **D** slimes
3. When stacking spores, some slimes count to about  
**A** 200   **B** 2,000   **C** 20,000   **D** 200,000
4. Somehow slime \_\_\_\_\_ food hidden in a maze.  
**A** hears   **B** smells   **C** tests   **D** senses
5. Sporangia are also called \_\_\_\_\_ bodies.  
**A** stacking   **B** countin   **C** fruiting   **D** spore
6. Slime hooked to a robot moves away from \_\_\_\_\_.  
**A** scientists   **B** noise   **C** a computer   **D** light
7. Slime may control a robot like a living \_\_\_\_\_.  
**A** brain   **B** eye   **C** computer   **D** scientist
8. Countin is a \_\_\_\_\_.  
**A** fruiting body   **B** protein   **C** enzyme   **D** slime
9. A mycologist studies \_\_\_\_\_.  
**A** funguses   **B** slime   **C** mucous   **D** bacteria
10. Slimes are \_\_\_\_\_ among things that live on Earth.  
**A** unknown   **B** strange   **C** common   **D** unique