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Sowbugs, Pillbugs, Millipedes, and Centipedes in the Home  
Michigan State University  
Cooperative Extension Service  
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# SOWBUGS, PILLBUGS, MILLIPEDES & CENTIPEDES

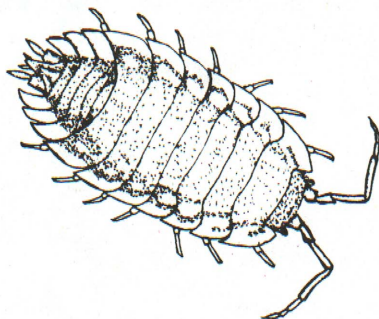
*in the home*

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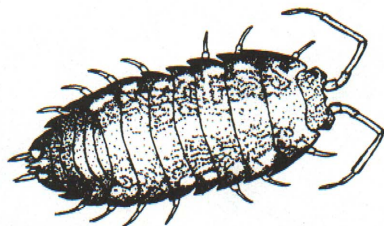
While sowbugs, pillbugs, millipedes, and centipedes are not insects, like insects they belong to the phylum Arthropoda. Arthropods possess articulated limbs and body. Often these animals will invade a home, and cause concern to the homeowner.

## Life History and Habits



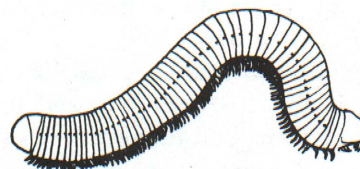
SOWBUG

Sowbugs are related to crustaceans such as shrimp and crayfish. They are gray to brown, and their upper surface is composed of heavy segmented plates. The common types have seven pairs of legs, and are about 13 millimeters ( $\frac{1}{2}$  inch) in length. One year is required for growth from egg to adult.



PILLBUG

Pillbugs look very much like sowbugs and they have similar habits. However, they can roll up into a ball when disturbed.



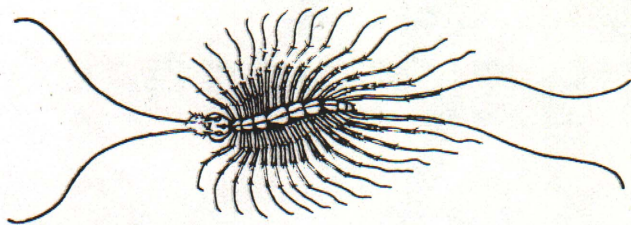
MILLIPEDE

Millipedes are more closely related to insects. They have 25 to 100 body segments, with each segment, except the head and the tip of the abdomen, bearing two pair of legs. Two short antennae are located on the head. The types generally found in homes are about 26 mm (1 inch) in length, slate gray, and hard shelled. When disturbed they coil up like a watch spring with their head tucked near their under surface.

Sowbugs, pillbugs, and millipedes feed on plant material, both living and dead. Sowbugs and pillbugs can be a pest in greenhouses as they feed on the roots and tender stems of greenhouse plants. In the household situation they are usually found in flower beds and other ornamental plantings where the soil is rich in organic matter. Often they will enter basements from these areas and become a nuisance.

Millipedes also feed on tender portions of the stems of living plants. However, their main food source is decaying vegetable material. Like sowbugs they can be found in flower gardens, and can invade basements and garages. Often high numbers of millipedes can be found in yards that have ornamental wood chips for walkways and plantings. The bark chips help keep the soil moist, and create many good hiding places for the millipedes.

Centipedes appear somewhat similar to millipedes; however, they possess only one pair of legs per body segment. A typical centipede is about 40 to 50 millimeters ( $1\frac{1}{2}$  to 2 inches) long, and possesses 15 or more leg-bearing segments. Two long antennae can be found on the head.



CENTIPEDE

Centipedes can be found in leaf piles, compost heaps, under stones, or under bark on felled trees. They are predaceous, and feed on insects, spiders, and other small animals. They occasionally enter homes from outdoors; however, their presence indoors is only considered a nuisance.

The house centipede is an unusual looking centipede. Its body is about 30 mm long and it has very long legs and antennae, and often moves so fast that it is difficult to get a good idea of what it actually looks like. The house centipede is an efficient predator, feeding on house flies, clothes moths, and small cockroaches. They should not be killed unless they become very numerous.

### Control

The first steps in control of these arthropods are preventive measures aimed at keeping them out of the house. All foundations and foundation sills should be tightly caulked to prevent entry. Keep manure and piles of organic matter away from buildings. Also, plant shrubs far enough away from the house to permit air circulation along the house. Occasionally, outside chemical treatment may be required to cut down on household invasion. In this case, a spray on the foundation and along the house on the ground using Diazinon (*Sprectracide*) is an effective control for millipedes, sowbugs, and pillbugs. Be sure to follow label directions for proper concentrations and applications.

Centipedes are seldom numerous enough to warrant chemical control if the previously mentioned cultural controls have been completed. Inside the house, a spot spray using a 0.5% *Baygon* aerosol can be used where these creatures are found. Spray sparingly, and read the insecticide label before use.