

Millipede Management for Homeowners

HANDOUT

There are small and large species of millipedes. Millipedes are similar to centipedes, but have two pairs of legs per body segment. Some people mistakenly refer to them as “wireworms”. Wireworms are the larval stage of a beetle that feeds on roots of plants. Millipedes are usually brown to blackish in color. The elongated body is rounded, not flattened, and they have no poison claws or legs. They usually coil up when disturbed, similar to the behavior exhibited by sowbugs or pillbugs (a related invertebrate).



Millipedes are usually restricted to moist places where they feed on organic matter. In the fall, they may become a nuisance because they migrate away from feeding areas and invade homes. Because they crawl along the ground, they are usually found in lower floors and basements. Once inside the home, they usually die due to desiccation, although in moist basements, they can survive longer.



Millipedes feed primarily on decaying organic matter, but may attack roots and leaves of seedling plants. Millipedes also live in organic matter (leaves, mulch, or piles of wood or wood chips) and other material close to the house. Over-mulching and/or overwatering in the garden can result in millipede attack on vegetable plants. Removing the organic debris or mulch materials near your home will help reduce the potential for invading millipedes.

To discourage millipedes near the house, remove mulch and dead vegetation adjacent to the house. Outdoors, you may wish to treat a 10 to 15 foot strip around the house perimeter with an insecticide. Do not forget to treat the exterior basement wall, window frames and door sills. Over-the-counter pyrethroid insecticides (active ingredient: bifenthrin, cyfluthrin, cypermethrin, lambda-cyhalothrin, pyrethrins, resmethrin, or tralomethrin) are recommended for control of millipedes because they are fast-acting. People and pets should stay off wet insecticides, but can safely walk on the yard once the insecticide is dry. When treating inside the home, baseboards, cracks, crevices or other hiding places such as under clothes washers and dryers in utility rooms may be sprayed with appropriately labeled pyrethroid products. Contact sprays of pyrethrins may be applied directly to centipedes and millipedes for quick control.

Appropriately labeled granular pyrethroid or carbaryl insecticide may be used on turf. They perform better than dusts or sprays in this situation.

The safest and most environmentally sound way to control millipedes and centipedes, that are already in the house, is to use a vacuum or broom to sweep them up. However, damp hiding places can be treated with indoor insecticides labeled for this use.

Millipedes are not poisonous, but many species have repugnatorial glands capable of producing irritating fluids which may produce allergic reactions in individuals sensitive to insects or insect secretions. A few millipede species are capable of squirting these fluids over a distance of several inches. Persons handling millipedes will notice a lingering odor on their hands and the fluid can be dangerous to the eyes. It is not advisable to handle millipedes, but when one has been held, hands should be washed with soap and water until the odor is completely gone.

All chemical information is given with the understanding that no endorsement of named products is intended, nor is criticism implied of similar products that are not mentioned. Before purchasing or using any pesticide, always read and carefully follow the directions on the container label.

John D. Hopkins, Ph.D.
Associate Professor and Extension Entomologist
Univ. of Arkansas, Coop. Exten. Service
2301 S. University Ave.
Little Rock, AR 72204
501-671-2217
jhopkins@uaex.edu

 **DIVISION OF AGRICULTURE**
RESEARCH & EXTENSION
University of Arkansas System