

Sowbugs and Pillbugs

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Sowbugs (*Porcellio* sp. and *Oniscus* sp.) and pillbugs (*Armadillidium* sp.) are not insects. They are crustaceans and as such are more closely related to crabs, shrimp, etc. Sowbugs (Fig. 1) and pillbugs (Fig. 2) are often considered as pests by gardeners because they are sometimes associated with gardens, found under boards in gardens, and in a variety of damp places. In many cases, they are found in rotting damp wood such as stumps or in cedar shakes where there is a moisture problem. They are generally considered as beneficial creatures, due to their role in recycling nutrients.

Sowbugs are grayish in color and prefer quite damp habitats. Pillbugs are bluish-black. Unlike sowbugs, they can roll up into a ball like an armadillo when disturbed. They appear to tolerate dryer conditions than sowbugs. Both can measure from $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{3}{8}$ inch in length when full-grown. Sowbugs are the major food prey of the common *Steatoda* spiders.



Fig. 1. The common sowbug, *Oniscus asellus*. By R.D. Akre



**Fig. 2. The common pillbug, *Armadillidium vulgare*.
By A.L. Antonelli.**