

Millipedes as a Household Nuisance

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Millipedes (Fig. 1 and 2) are arthropods in the class Diplopoda. They are characterized by being wormlike, quite elongate. Size varies with species, some being a few millimeters long while others may be up to several inches. Except for the front segments, Millipedes have two pairs of legs on each body segment. These creatures may have more than 30 pairs of legs. Sometimes confused with centipedes, which are flat in cross-section, predacious, and fast moving, millipedes are blocky or round in cross-section, detritus feeders (largely), and slow moving.



Fig. 1. A large native species of millipede in leaf litter.



Fig. 2. A small native species of millipede in highly organic soil.

Millipedes in our own area depend on and live in damp situations like moss, under damp leaves, or under stones, etc. It is when conditions like these become scarce such as during hot dry periods that millipedes can be seen wandering (particularly at night) and trying to enter buildings in search of dampness. Millipedes can also be nuisances in humid situations when they randomly enter garages, intrude under door thresholds, or fall into basement window wells where they can enter homes through basement windows even when open only a crack. Since millipedes need moisture and of course food (rotting leaves, etc.), the home is usually not a user-friendly environment and ultimately they dry up and die. This is commonly evidenced by the dried up chunks of millipedes often submitted to our clinic.

Millipedes will not harm humans or anything in the home. They are simply a nuisance. There are home insecticides that can be used around the foundation to suppress the problem, however, one should initiate prevention by disallowing entry under door thresholds, etc. as a long-term solution.

Reference:

An Introduction to the Study of Insects. Third Ed. 1971. D.J. Borror and D.M. Long.
Holt, Rhinehart, and Winston. 812 pp.