

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Historical Materials from University of
Nebraska-Lincoln Extension

Extension

1996

NF96-303 Millipedes and Centipedes

David L. Keith

University of Nebraska--Lincoln, dkeith1@unl.edu

Frederick P. Baxendale

University of Nebraska--Lincoln, fbaxendale1@unl.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/extensionhist>



Part of the [Agriculture Commons](#), and the [Curriculum and Instruction Commons](#)

Keith, David L. and Baxendale, Frederick P., "NF96-303 Millipedes and Centipedes" (1996). *Historical Materials from University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension*. 1067.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/extensionhist/1067>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Extension at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Historical Materials from University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Millipedes and Centipedes

David L. Keith, Extension Entomologist
Frederick P. Baxendale, Extension Entomologist



Millipedes (Order *Julida*).
Photo: J. Kalisch — UNL)

Warm, wet weather always encourages the activity of several moisture-loving animals, including millipedes, or "thousand-legged worms," and their near relatives, the centipedes. At times millipedes become so abundant, that they may constitute a "millipede invasion" entering homes and other buildings. Millipedes are cylindrical, segmented, worm-like creatures, with two pairs of legs on each body segment, except for the last three, which have one pair. Over 1000 species occur in the United States. They are encouraged by wet conditions and the overuse of mulches in flower and vegetable gardens.

Centipedes are related to millipedes and are also worm-like in form, but they differ in having flattened bodies and only one pair of legs on each body segment. They also possess a pair of poison claws or legs just behind the head which are used to paralyze their prey — usually insects or other small animals. Most centipedes are beneficial, but the large species found in the tropics, which may reach a length of up to 18 inches, can inflict painful bites. These, fortunately, are not found in Nebraska, but one species found in western counties may reach a length of 5 inches.

Life Cycle

Millipede eggs are deposited in masses in the soil. Young millipedes have fewer segments than the adult, but they add segments at each molt of the outer shell, or exoskeleton. Molting occurs 7-10 times before maturity. Young millipedes mature the second year after hatching. Some species may live for several years. Similarly, centipedes molt several times, adding legs and body segments with each molt.

Damage

Millipedes feed on organic matter, including decayed plant material such as leaves and wood, and occasionally, living plant roots and rootlets, and developing fruit such as melons (especially

cantaloupes) and cucumbers. Affected plants may wilt and die and melons may develop rots caused by bacteria or fungi which are introduced by millipede feeding. If millipedes are abundant in mulches and litter in landscape plantings around homes and other buildings, they often enter through cracks and crevices. Once inside, they usually die unless basements are very moist. Entry into structures is most common after heavy spring rains saturate the soil and drive millipedes to higher ground and in the fall, when they seek hibernation sites.

Centipedes can be found outdoors, often under stones, boards or in wood piles. They also live under leaf litter and other organic matter. Occasionally these outdoor species invade homes and buildings where they are a nuisance, but are not destructive.

Prevention and Control

To prevent millipede problems, simply reduce mulch thickness, reduce watering schedules or pull mulch away from plants and allow them to dry, reducing millipede feeding and reproduction. To prevent millipedes from entering homes, be sure that screens are tight, that moisture-holding debris in window wells is eliminated, and that mulches around ornamental plantings are at least 6-8 inches away from the foundation.

Homeowners who need to control centipedes should first get the pest identified to see if it is an invader from outdoors or an indoor species associated with an insect infestation. The continued presence of the house centipede, a long-legged, fast-moving species, may indicate a household insect problem, since these are their principal food. If centipedes are common indoors, look for insects such as cockroaches, attic flies, boxelder bugs, elm leaf beetles and others. Controlling these insects may be the key to eliminating the centipedes.

Removing mulch adjacent to the foundation or occasionally allowing it to dry out should also reduce centipede and millipede activity. Indoors, these pests may be controlled with natural or synthetic insecticide aerosols such as pyrethrins, available under many brand names.

To control millipedes and centipedes outside, establish a 3-5 foot wide barrier strip of a residual insecticide such as diazinon, chlorpyrifos (Dursban) or carbaryl (Sevin) around the exterior home foundation to prevent them from entering. Prior to treatment, make foundation repairs and caulk all cracks and crevices. Use either granular or spray (wettable powder or emulsifiable concentrate) formulations. If millipede invasions are heavy, it may be necessary to increase the width of the treated area to 15 or 20 feet into the adjacent lawn.

File NF303 under: INSECTS AND PESTS

G-2, Household Pests

Issued September 1996

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Elbert C. Dickey, Director of Cooperative Extension, University of Nebraska, Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension educational programs abide with the non-discrimination policies of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the United States Department of Agriculture.