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EC64-1597 Control of Millipedes

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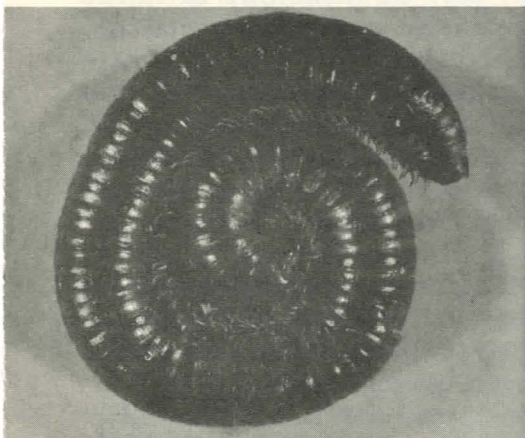
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CONTROL of Millipedes

By Robert Roselle
Extension Entomologist

Description

Millipedes, also called thousand-legged worms, spring worms, and wireworms, are long, slender animals about 1 inch long and 2/16 inch wide when fully grown, and have a large number of short legs on each side of the body. There are several kinds, but the one most common in gardens and homes is dark brown, cylindrical and hard shelled. Millipedes are slow-moving and coil like a watch spring when disturbed. They have 4 legs on each body segment. These characteristics easily distinguish them from centipedes which have 2 long legs per body segment, are very active, and do not coil.

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Type of Injury

Millipedes usually feed on decaying organic material, fruits, and vegetables. They may be numerous in lawns and gardens that have a high content of organic material, in manure, mulch, grass clippings or other vegetable matter. They will damage strawberries, tomatoes, or other fruits and vegetables on the ground. Rarely they burrow into potatoes, carrots, and other root crops, or injure seedlings of field crops, or tender plants in greenhouses. Millipedes always feed in moist habitats.

In the fall they become a nuisance when they migrate into homes. Here they cause no damage and will, in time, starve. They do not bite humans or animals.

Control

Since millipedes prefer moist surroundings, migration into homes may be reduced by keeping the outside foundation as dry as possible by raking all dead grass and other vegetation away from the foundation. Foundation plantings may be trimmed to allow passage of sunlight and air. Openings around basement windows, and cracks in the wall may be sealed with a caulking compound.

Most insecticides are not highly effective against millipedes. Sevin, malathion, and Zectran dusts may provide some degree of control. A 5% dust of Sevin or malathion applied liberally around the outside foundation and into the lawn will kill many millipedes. Zectran is not generally available, but in time should be found on dealers shelves. If Zectran is used, follow the manufacturer's directions carefully.

Fall plowing of home gardens may reduce the numbers of millipedes. Supporting vegetables off the ground will prevent millipede damage. To prevent damage in strawberry beds and gardens, apply 5% Sevin or malathion dusts, or a spray containing 4 tablespoons of 50% Sevin wettable powder to one gallon of water, before berries have set. Sprays containing 2 tablespoons of 50% Sevin wettable powder to one gallon of water can be applied after fruit set. Strawberries and vegetables should not be eaten for at least three days after application.

Millipedes hiding in protected places during the day can be trapped under boards placed around foundations and in the garden.

Poison baits can be used in locations where there would be absolutely no danger to children and pets. A suggested bait is a mixture of 2 quarts dry bran, 1 ounce paris green, 1 cup molasses thoroughly mixed, and moistened with 1 quart of water. If paris green is not available, other materials such as arsenate of lead, or a 50% wettable powder insecticide may be substituted. Commercial poison baits are sometimes available. If they are used, follow the manufacturers directions. Always remember that poisoned baits may be a hazard to humans and animals if not used with extreme caution. Around buildings and in the garden the bait should be placed in little piles and covered with small boards.

Inside homes it is best to sweep up millipedes or to use a fly swatter rather than to use insecticides. Millipedes are harmless in the home, as they do not damage homes or furnishings.

Caution

Insecticides are poisons and must be handled with great care to avoid accidental poisoning to children and pets. Always use them according to the label directions, and always store unused insecticides in the original container with the label intact, out of reach of children.