

Millipedes in Gardens

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Millipedes (“thousand-legged worms”) are slow moving, usually hard-bodied, worm-like animals related to insects. Their bodies have many segments, most segments having two pairs of legs. Millipede color and size varies, but those common in garden soils are brown to white and about ½ inch long or less. Often they are coiled. Millipedes (Fig. 1 and 2) usually live in and feed on moist, decaying plant material (including manure and compost), and live in moist soils containing such materials. As saprophytes they are considered beneficial (Fig. 3). Soils high in organic matter have more millipedes, and plant damage in such soils is more frequent. They may cause serious damage by eating small roots and tunneling into larger roots, bulbs, and tubers. Frequently they are found in feeding wounds made in strawberries, etc. by slugs (Fig. 4). It appears that the fermentation juices in these wounds attract the millipedes.

Management

Avoid repeated additions of large amounts of organic matter to the soil. Do not water plants more often than is necessary for good culture.

Pesticides are not recommended for millipede management.



Fig. 1. One of our smaller millipedes.
80X (*Julus* sp.). By L.J. du Toit



Fig. 2. One of our larger millipedes
> 2 inches. By R.D. Akre



Fig. 3. Our common forest millipede is highly beneficial. By. A.L. Antonelli



Fig. 4. Millipedes congregating in slug bite wound. Author unknown.

Selected Reference: Borror, Donald J. and Dwight M. DeLong. *An Introduction to the Study of Insects*. 3rd Ed. New York, Holt, Rhinehart, and Winston, Inc. 1977.