# Millipedes and Centipedes

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**Introduction**

Centipedes and millipedes are distant relatives of lobsters, crayfish and shrimp. Unlike their marine cousins, centipedes and millipedes are land dwellers, but they do prefer moist habitats or areas of high humidity. They usually are considered nuisances rather than destructive pests. Centipedes pose an occasional threat to man because they have poison glands and will bite. Although usually not life threatening, their bites can cause some pain and swelling. Millipedes may occasionally damage seedling plants by feeding on stems and leaves.

**Centipede**

There are many species of centipedes. They vary in size from about an inch in length to over 6 inches. Centipedes have flattened, elongated, segmented bodies with one pair of legs on most of their body segments. They have a distinct head with a pair of long, many segmented antennae. Jaws located on the first body segment behind the head are connected to poison glands that are used to kill insects and other small creatures for food.

While most centipedes live mainly outdoors and only accidentally enter houses, the house centipede, *Scutigera coleoptrata*, is capable of reproducing in homes. Although centipedes are beneficial in that they destroy other insects, most people have an aversion to their presence in homes.

**Millipede**

Millipedes normally live outdoors where they feed on damp and decaying wood and vegetable matter, as well as tender roots and green leaves. Their slow-crawling, rounded bodies have two pairs of legs on most body segments. They are generally brownish in color and about 1 to 1 1/2 inch in length. Millipedes protect themselves by means of glands which secrete an unpleasant odor. Millipedes are most troublesome in the fall of the year, when hordes may crawl into homes, presumably seeking shelter.

**Control Measures**

Since household infestations generally result from high populations outside the home, it is usually difficult to obtain complete control unless the outside premises are treated. Historically, wettable powder formulations of carbamate insecticides such as carbaryl (Sevin), propoxur (Baygon) or bendiocarb (Ficam) have been recommended for millipede control. However, recently a whole host of new insecticides have come on the market. Many of the new products contain synthetic pyrethroids with names such as bifenthrin, cyfluthrin, cypermethrin, deltamethrin, esenfenvalerate, lambda-cyhalothrin, permethrin, resmethrin, tetramethrin and tralomethrin. Since there are literally several hundred products on the market probably the best recommendation is to visit a local supplier of lawn or home insecticides and look for a product labeled for the pest and the location that you want to treat.

In general, for treatments outside the home insecticides need to be applied to form a barrier of 5 to 10 feet around the structure. Treatments must be thorough and cover foundation walls, steps, porches, window wells, sidewalks and especially doorways and other openings. It may be helpful to remove plant mulch, leaves, boards, rocks, compost piles, etc., to remove hiding places and aid control.

In the home, one must first decide if the problem can be easily controlled by hand picking or vacuuming to remove individuals, which may be all that is needed, if populations are minimal. However, if populations are high or persistent, then the use of an insecticide may be justified. Contact or aerosol sprays may be applied directly to centipedes or millipedes for quick knockdown, however their effects are short lived. Residual sprays can be used to treat baseboards, cracks, crevices and other hiding places. Some bait and dust formulations may also be available for use under sinks and refrigerators.

**CAUTION:** Regardless of the chemical(s) used, for specific directions read and follow the manufacturer's label carefully.

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