

Centipedes



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Appearing ghostlike as it speeds across the floor, the house centipede is a common inhabitant of basements and below-ground living spaces. Able to run very fast, it makes sudden stops before continuing. At times it may become trapped in a sink or bathtub, unable to escape over the smooth, slick surface.

Identification, Biology, and Habits

Called “hundred legged worms” by some, centipedes actually are not worms and not even insects. Rather, they are long, flattened, fast-moving arthropods. And rather than 100 legs, they have one pair of legs per segment, with many having no more than 30 legs.

Centipedes are predaceous on insects, spiders, and earthworms. Consequently, their front legs are modified to accommodate a set of poison glands with which they kill their prey.

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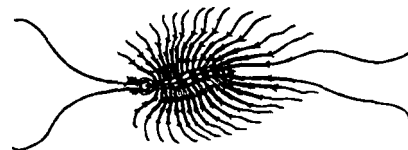
Approximately 3,000 species of centipedes are known worldwide. In West Virginia most species live outdoors under rocks, planters, or landscape mulch. The only species that can survive and reproduce indoors is the house centipede, *Scutigera coleoptrata*.

A native of Mexico, the house centipede is now found throughout the United States. The house centipede is 1-inch to 1-1/2-inches long, yellowish gray with three dark stripes running the length of its body.

The adult has long antennae and 15 pairs of long, white-banded legs. When young house centipedes first hatch, they have only four pairs of legs. The number of legs increases with each molt they make as they grow to adulthood.

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House centipedes live in damp basements, bathrooms, attached garages, and below-ground living areas—any place where they can find insects to eat. They normally hide during daylight hours, coming out at night to hunt for flies and other insects.



House centipede

Although all centipedes have poison glands, homeowners need not fear being

attacked by the house centipede. Its jaws are weak and it generally does not bite people.

Prevention Methods

Because they are predaceous on insects and spiders, centipedes actually are beneficial

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arthropods and potential biological control agents for household pests. This fact, however, is not enough to convince some homeowners to tolerate them.

You may be able to discourage centipedes from setting up housekeeping with nonchemical habitat modification techniques.

Control Strategies

To control large infestations, apply boric acid insecticide dust to cracks and crevices and behind baseboards in areas where you have seen

... potential biological control agents for household pests.

centipedes. To kill an occasional one, a pyrethrin aerosol will provide quick knock-down, or you can simply step on it or squash it with a fly swatter.

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