

Sowbugs & Pillbugs



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Sowbugs and pillbugs are common around everyone's home—familiar by appearance if not by name. They are not insects, however. Known technically as "isopods," the armadillo-like crustaceans are more closely related to shrimp and lobsters.

Identification

Sowbugs and pillbugs are oval-shaped, usually gray (although one common species of pillbug also comes in pink), about 1/4-inch to 3/8-inch long, with seven pairs of legs. Pillbugs are sometimes called "roly-polys" because they roll into a ball if they're disturbed. Sowbugs have two short, tail-like appendages and are unable to roll into a ball.

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Biology and Habits

Sowbugs and pillbugs live outdoors in moist areas, most commonly in places with large amounts of plant material. They are scavengers that feed on decaying organic matter. Large populations often can be found in compost piles or leaf litter. Female sowbugs and pillbugs do not lay eggs but carry them internally in a brood pouch. Each brood of approximately 30 young is carried for about 1-1/2 months before hatching.

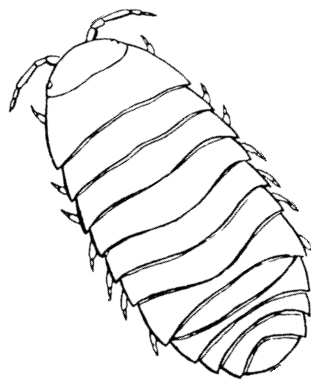
Since sowbugs and pillbugs are crustaceans, they will perish if they are unable to obtain enough moisture. To maintain their required moisture levels, they normally stay in the mulch around ornamental plantings or beneath rocks, logs, or flower containers. Occasional minor

household invasions occur when sowbugs and pillbugs living near the foundations of houses under bark mulch, boards, or other items find their way in through cracks and crevices. They are only nuisance pests indoors and cause no damage.

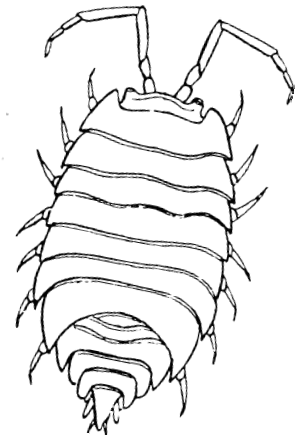
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Prevention Methods

Prevention centers around three tactics: (1) habitat modification, (2) exclusion, and (3) moisture control. Eliminate decaying plant matter and remove rocks, boards, mulch, and leaves from around the foundation of your house to decrease its attractiveness to sowbugs and pillbugs. Keep



Pillbug



Sowbug

sowbugs and pillbugs out of the house by repairing cracked basement windows and foundation blocks and by caulking openings.

Since sowbugs and pillbugs require moisture, moisture control is an effective prevention method in some situations. The moisture in crawl spaces can be reduced with plastic vapor barriers in combination with ventilation openings. In living areas or basements, an air-conditioner or a dehumidifier can be used to control moisture.

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Control Strategies

The environment inside houses is normally too dry for sowbugs and pillbugs to survive; those that do get in generally die very quickly. If a few pillbugs or sowbugs get into your house, simply use a vacuum cleaner to remove them.

For large infestations, boric acid or diatomaceous earth dust can be applied to crawl spaces; pyrethrins or pyrethroid aerosols can be used inside living areas. Control methods are more effective and longer lasting, however, if combined with prevention methods mentioned above. Be certain to read and follow label directions if you use a pesticide.

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