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Pesky Pill Bugs

Pill bugs might be entering households this fall, due to the lack of moisture and cooler weather. Pill bugs are in the Class Crustacea so they are closely related to shrimp, lobsters and crabs. Pill bugs have seven sets of legs and their color varies from dark gray to white. They get their name from rolling into a tight ball when bothered.

Pill bugs are typically found under rocks, boards, bricks, trash, decaying vegetation, logs, or any area with a high humidity level. Mulch, grass clippings, and leaf litter provide enough decaying organic matter to allow these creatures to survive. They are considered omnivores feeding on dead or decaying plants or animals, so some may feed on the young roots and shoots of live plants.

The female pill bug produces offspring which she carries in a pouch under her body, until they can take care of themselves. Although mating is common, males can be produced through parthenogenesis. An immature pill bug will molt four or five times, before becoming an adult. The immature pill bugs look like adults except for size, color and sexual development. There are usually multiple generations a year.

Pill bugs are generally harmless in landscapes and they are usually considered beneficial, since they break down organic matter. However, they can become a serious pest in greenhouses if large populations exist.

Some Control Options

Non-Chemical Controls:

Reduce areas of moisture, especially areas where moss or fungi inhabit.
Protect natural enemies such as frogs, toads, and spiders.
Remove plant debris to discourage pill bugs.

Chemical Controls:

If infestation exists, then granules and perimeter sprays can be applied around structures and within the landscape, such as those containing bifenthrin.



Adult Pillbug. Photo by: Texas A&M University.

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