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Centipedes and Millipedes

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More nuisance than destructive pests, centipedes and millipedes do not transmit diseases to plants, animals or man. However, larger species of centipedes may have a painful bite, and millipedes occasionally feed on stems and leaves of seedling plants, damaging them.

Centipedes and millipedes are classi ed in the subphylum Myriapoda ("many legs"), which also includes symphylans and pauropods, other arthropods with similar appearance. Most Myriapoda live in humid, moist environments and are commonly found in soil or leaf litter and under rocks or wood.

Description

Both centipedes and millipedes have long, segmented bodies connected to heads with a single pair of antennae.

Centipedes vary from brown to grey to red to greenish-blue. Their wormlike, attened bodies have one pair of legs per segment. Over time, the rst pair of legs has become modi ed to function as claws for capturing prey and subduing it with injections of venom made by poison glands. Although most centipedes found in Texas are relatively small, the fully-grown *Scolopendra heros* (gure 1) can reach lengths over nine inches.

Figure 1. *Scolopendra heros*, a giant centipede

Millipedes' bodies are cylindrical with two pairs of legs per segment. Texas millipedes typically are brownish but can vary from red to yellow to orange. When disturbed, a millipede often curls into a spiral to protect itself (gure 2).

Figure 2. A millipede.

Biology and habits

Centipedes live from 1 to 6 years, overwintering as adults. They prefer moist, protected habitats, for example, under stones, rotted logs, leaves or bark. Although a few species give birth to live young, most centipedes lay eggs in soil during the warm months. The eggs are covered by a sticky substance.

Centipedes are predators, with many species feeding on other arthropods like insects by injecting them with venom from claws located directly under the centipedes' heads. For most centipedes, these claws are their only weapons, in icting bee-like stings. However, the species *Scolopendra heros* can injure with each of its many walking legs, which are tipped with sharp claws that can make tiny cuts in human skin. *Scolopoendra* can drop poison (produced from the attachment point of each leg) into these cuts, in aming and irritating the wounds. So, to prevent injury, the best rule of thumb is never to handle centipedes.

House centipedes, *Scutigera coleoptrera*, are bene cial because they eat insects, but many people consider them nuisance pests. House centipedes live in damp places, such as closets, bathrooms or areas underneath homes. This species of centipede reaches about 1-½ inches in length and has fteen pairs of long, slender legs. it searches for insects at night, using its back legs to "lasso" prey.

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Millipedes can live more than 10 years. They prefer cool, moist environments, such as leaf litter, mulch or compost piles, and lay eggs singly or in small groups. Large numbers of these animals may move into homes after heavy rainfall or during droughts. Millipedes eat primarily decaying organic matter, although some species are carnivorous.

Millipedes are not poisonous but produce a smelly glandular fluid that can be irritating to humans, especially if they rub the fluid into their eyes. After handling millipedes, people should wash their hands with soap and water until all odor is gone.

Control

To prevent millipedes and centipedes from moving indoors:

- Move harborage (such as compost piles, firewood and stones) away from structures.
- Create a band of gravel or similar material between the house foundation and any flower beds that touch the structure.
- For flower beds against the home, occasionally turn mulch to allow it to dry out.
- Seal any accessible areas that could allow centipedes and millipedes to move into the house. Check seals around doors and windows as well as pipe penetrations for any access points.
- Properly ventilate crawl spaces or other areas under the home to allow airflow through these areas.

Perimeter sprays around building foundations may help keep centipedes and millipedes from moving indoors. Look for products with such active ingredients as deltamethrin, permethrin, bifenthrin or cypermethrin.

Inside the home:

- Treat crack and crevice areas as well as baseboards and other hiding places using products with active ingredients such as lambda-cyhalothrin, cypermethrin, permethrin or bifenthrin.
- Treat wall voids with boric acid or diatomaceous earth.

Inside the home, you also may use plant-derived pesticide formulations with active ingredients such as d-limonene (citrus extract), rosemary oil, clove oil, thyme oil or sesame oil.

Remember that insecticide label clearances are subject to change; such changes may have occurred since printing of this publication. Pesticide users are always responsible for the effects of pesticides on plants or household goods, as well as for problems caused by drift of pesticides from their properties to other plants or properties. Always read and carefully follow label instructions when using pesticides.

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