



Exopest Fact Sheet -Portuguese Millipedes

Portuguese millipedes invade Buildings in a number of city and country areas in Victoria. These millipedes are now part of the environment. This fact sheet describes something of their life history and how you can minimise the impact of invasions.

Description

The Portuguese millipede belongs to a group of animals which have many body segments and two pairs of legs on most body segments. Millipedes are vegetarians, eating soft vegetation such as decaying leaf litter, mosses and pollen. Many species of millipedes occur in temperate and tropical parts of the world; Australia has numerous native species, some of which occur in Victoria.



Benefits

Millipedes are important in soil formation. They break down leaf litter and enrich the soil.

Millipedes as pests

Portuguese millipedes are pests because they invade houses and commercial buildings. They are one of the few millipede species that are attracted to lights at night, and this behaviour explains why they invade buildings. Once inside they usually die sometimes in mass around the edges of rooms. They do not breed inside buildings it is usually a mass migration from surrounding paddocks, large or vacant blocks, and mulched gardens.

Millipede invasions vary in intensity, depending on the environment surrounding the building. Where millipedes are dense, invasions of hundreds, or even thousands, may occur during several days.

Millipedes and health

There is no evidence that Portuguese millipedes affect human health. Their bodies contain rows of glands that secrete a pungent yellowish secretion when the millipede is agitated. This secretion is composed of organic chemicals called quinones, which make the millipede distasteful to predators such as birds. Quinones quickly break down in water.

Distribution

As their name suggests, Portuguese millipedes originated in Portugal and Spain, but have been accidentally introduced into several countries, including Australia. The species was first reported from Port Lincoln in 1953, and has since been recorded in WA, ACT, Victoria and Tasmania.

Movements

Millipedes do not walk far; adults probably move a maximum of several hundred metres a year. Movement over longer distances is through soil or woodchips being transported from millipede-infested areas.

Invasions

Invasions of buildings occur seasonally in spring and again in autumn; the autumn invasion is usually more intense and goes on longer. During autumn, adults move on the surface, and mate and disperse. The millipedes that invade a building have probably bred within a distance (approx 1-200m) from the building.

Life cycle

The adult millipedes that invade are about two years old. Before invading, they develop in the surrounding soil and litter. During the first year of life millipedes are quite small, and easily overlooked.

Control

The most practical strategy to prevent millipedes from invading is to form a barrier around the building to intercept them before they enter. Large-scale suppression of millipedes away from buildings is probably practicable only by biological control. So it will not eradicate but reduce numbers to a more manageable situation until the migration ceases.

Chemical barriers

The aim of chemical application is to present millipedes with a treated surface wide enough to kill them before they enter the building. Temprid (Imidachloprid) and Ficam (Bendiocarb) are chemicals registered for use against millipedes. External perimeter and spray to doorways and internal perimeter with the registered chemicals will reduce numbers but the client will still need to sweep up and remove the dead ones.

Chemical treatment when applied by Exopest professionals according to instructions on the label is safe to humans and does not persist in the environment.

When applied to brick or cement surfaces it remains active against millipedes for several weeks if the surface remains dry. Rainfall reduces its life, and it may be necessary to reapply several times in a season. ***Reduction not eradication is the best control possible due to the mass migration***