K-STATE Kansas State University RESEARCH AND EXTENSION
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Problem: Sowbugs (*Porcellio laevis*) and Pillbugs (*Armadillium vulgare*)

Hosts: Young seedlings of various plants

Description: Sowbugs and pillbugs are classified as crustaceans and are distributed worldwide. In Europe, sowbugs and pillbugs are commonly called woodlice. In the United States, they are sometimes referred to as roly-poly's. Both sowbugs and pillbugs are oval or convex in shape, segmented, and are flattened underneath the body. They are black, gray, or brown in color depending on age, and 5 to 8 mm long. Sowbugs possess two small, tail-like appendages located at the end of the body; pillbugs do not have appendages. Pillbugs are able to roll into a ball. Sowbugs cannot. Sowbugs and pillbugs are always found in moist environments because they cannot control moisture loss from their bodies. They primarily feed on decaying organic matter because they possess weak chewing mouthparts, but they may occasionally feed on the stems and roots of young seedlings. Both sowbugs and pillbugs are nocturnal, actively feeding at night, but can be observed during the daytime after rains or during cloudy conditions. Adults can live up to 2 years or more.

Recommendations: The primary means of dealing with sowbugs and pillbugs is by habitat manipulation. For example, raking mulch and leaf debris will expose sowbugs and pillbugs to natural enemies and pest control materials. Applications of pest control materials are generally not required indoors because sowbugs and pillbugs will quickly dry-out and die after entering homes. Commercially available products for homeowners labeled for control or suppression of sowbug/pillbug populations (primarily outdoors) may contain the following active ingredients; beta-cyfluthrin, cyhalothrin (Spectracide Triazide, Bonide Eight Garden & Home RTU) and permethrin (Bonide Eight Vegetable, Fruit & Flower Concentrate). Another product commercially available contains a combination of materials including 2-phenethyl propionate, sodium lauryl sulfate, eugenol, thyme oil, and sesame oil. Most of these active ingredients will only kill sowbugs and/or pillbugs on contact so repeat applications may be required.

References:

1. Pillbugs and Sowbugs, K-State Research & Extension, EP-120

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