

# School-to-Nature



Millipede – Nicknamed 1000-Legger



Close-up of 2 sets of legs per body segment

## Millipede

There are 16,000 species of Millipedes worldwide. They are cousins to the Centipede. Even though they are nicknamed “1000-Legger,” most species have only a few hundred legs. They have 2 pairs of legs per body segment and have 25 to 100 segments. Millipedes vary greatly in size (1/4 inch to 12 inches long) and how long they live (2 to 10 years), depending on the species. They curl into a spiral when they die or feel threatened.

Millipedes live in the soil, coming out at night to hunt. In daylight they look for moist sheltered areas. They prefer unfarmed fields, vacant grassy areas, and wooded areas with an accumulation of leaf litter. Millipedes have poor vision but they don't require it to survive. They breathe through pores in the sides of their bodies. They are recyclers, quickly breaking down nature's waste and recycling nutrients back into the soil. As much as they love to eat the garbage in a compost pile, they will also eat seeds and young plants in the garden.



After mating, the female Millipede lays 100-300 eggs deep in warm, loose soil. About two weeks are spent in the egg stage, then the babies become “nymphs” through a molting process, with just a few pairs of legs. 3 pairs of legs appear after a 2nd molting. They will go through 7 or 8 molts, shedding the exoskeleton, before becoming full adults in 2 to 5 years. They live in the soil until they become adults. Millipedes hibernate in winter, seeking out deep cracks, crevices, or deep soil.

Even though they are considered to look creepy, Millipedes do not bite or sting. A few species have glands that can produce hydrochloric acid which can cause a reaction on human skin, so be careful in handling a Millipede, and wash up after.

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