

# School-to-Nature



Roly-Poly In A Ball



Roly-Poly Size



Molting half of its Shell

## Pill Bug

(Also called Potato Bug, Roly-Poly, Sow Bug)

This cute “bug” isn’t a bug at all. It is a Crustacean, like a Crayfish, but is the only one that has adapted to spending its entire life on land. The name Roly-Poly is given because it can roll itself into a ball when disturbed, as shown in the photo above; and many people prefer that name. Pill Bugs are  $\frac{1}{2}$ -  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch long, oval in shape, grey or dark brown, with seven armor-like segments behind the head, and seven pairs of legs. They absorb oxygen through their gills, which can only function when wet; and so Pill Bugs must live and remain where the air is very moist, such as under rotting leaves or under logs.

Pill Bugs are most active at night, feeding on rotting plants and animals, and even the feces of animals. They occasionally will also feed on live plants. They can drink water but their bodies also absorb water through structures called uropods, near their back end.

They live about two years, molting their armored shells occasionally, in two stages: the shell splits across the body and the back half sheds off (see the photo at the top), then several days later, the front half is shed. They are most vulnerable to predators at this time. Pill bugs are a favorite food of birds, toads, spiders, some wasp species, centipedes, and millipedes.

Females lay about 50 eggs into a pouch on their underbelly between the first five pairs of legs. 2-3 months later, the eggs hatch and babies emerge 3-4 days later. See the photo to the right.



To survive freezing temperatures, they hibernate under boards, logs, or other sheltering debris. Pill Bug bodies actually have an “antifreeze” chemical that can keep them alive in below-freezing temperatures.

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