

Compost Critters Information Page

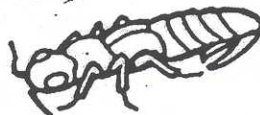
Slug

I have muscular discs on my undersides that are adapted for creeping and crawling. I lay eggs masses that look like jello. I eat living material but will make an appearance from time to time in your compost pile to eat fresh garbage and garden trimmings.



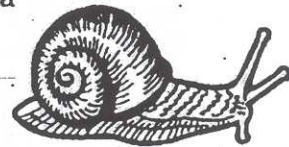
Springtail

I am a tiny insect less than 1/16 inch long. I eat molds and decaying materials. I have a little spring that helps me jump high into the air. I am white in color.



Snail

Like my friend, the slug, I am a mollusk and creep around on my muscular belly. I carry on my back a spirally curved shell. I also have a broad retractable foot and a distinct head. Like slugs, I prefer to eat living material, but I will also show up in your compost pile or worm box from time to time for lunch.



Mite

I am tiny. I would take 25 of us to cover an inch-long line. My body is round and fat so it's hard to see my 8 legs. I eat plant materials such as mold and soft tissues of leaves. Some of us eat manure of other organisms. I am usually white or brown.



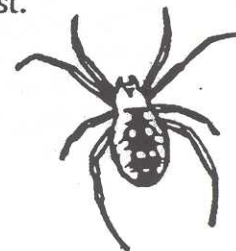
Collembola

I am a close relative of the springtail but I can't jump. I am tiny, and less than 1/16 of an inch long. I eat molds and decaying matter. I am white in color.



Spider

I am related to mites and have nifty legs. I am one of the least appreciated animals in the garden and compost. I feed on other insects and work hard to help control pests that will hurt a garden.



Millipede

I have so many legs you would have a hard time counting them. My name means "thousand legs," but I don't have that many. I am very shy and I roll up in a ball to avoid danger. I am a vegetarian and eat soft, moist, decaying plants. I am dark-red in color and am 1 to 3 inches long.



Beetle

I am an insect with shiny black, tough wings and am about 1/2 inch long. I am a predator and eat slugs, snails and soft insects such as caterpillars. I live beneath stones, boards and other moist places.



Worm Cocoon

You can find me in a worm bin or compost pile. Before I have hatched, I am clear and yellowish and the shape of a lemon, and 1/8 inch long. After I have hatched I turn pea green. Two or more baby worms are hatched at once.



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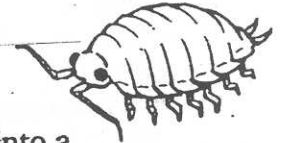
Pill Bug or Roly Poly

I am an isopod, which means I have ten pairs of legs that look very similar to each other. I eat old leaves and veggie scraps. I am about 1/2 inch long and I roll up in a ball if I am disturbed. Some people think that I look like a little armadillo. I am a greyish, dark color.



Sow Bug

I have 10 pairs of legs. That makes me an isopod like my cousin the Roly Poly. I eat vegetation and old leaves. My 1/2 inch long body is oval and flat with flattened plates, but I can't roll up into a ball like Roly Poly. I am related to crayfish and lobsters. I breathe with gills, so I must live in a damp, moist place. I am a dark, greyish color.



White Worm

I look like a frayed piece of thread. I am a skinny, white worm. I am 1/2 to 1 inch long. I am related to an earthworm. I like to eat rotting food after the other bugs get to it. You might think of me as one who likes to finish off the job.



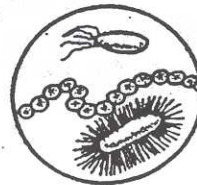
Centipede

I move quickly on my many legs. I have 15-137 segments with a pair of legs on each. I am a fierce hunter. I love to eat earthworms. I use my pair of poison claws to help keep my prey from getting away. I am about 1 to 2 inches long. I am usually reddish brown.



Bacteria

We are so tiny that you can't even see us. We are everywhere. I am colorless. I can eat almost anything. Some of us live together in groups and others don't.



Earthworm

I am a long, thin soft-bodied animal. My body is made up of little segments. I do not have legs or eyes. I sense light and I breathe through my skin. I eat bacteria, fungi, and other decaying materials. I like dark, moist places.



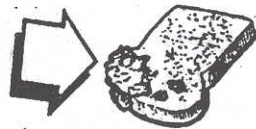
Ant

I am an insect with 6 legs. I help to decompose by breaking materials into smaller particles. I create tunnels, and move soil into clumps. Some people would rather not have me around their homes. I am black, brown, or red.



Mold

I am a fungus. I am related to mushrooms. Most of us live on old food. You might see me on old food in your home or your worm bin.



Fruit Fly

I am a very small fly. People don't like me, but I don't bite, sting, or make buzzing sounds. I don't harm earthworms either. Sometimes you will see me around a worm bin if a person forgot to bury their food. I like to lay my eggs where it's moist and warm.



Source: *Do the Rot Thing: A Teacher's Guide to Compost Activities*, Alameda County Waste Management Authority & Source Reduction and Recycling Board, 1993.