

THE GARDEN SYMPHYLID

What It Is, What It Does, What To Do About It

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The garden symphylid, or centipede, can make the difference between profit and loss in growing plants. Learn to recognize and control this pest.

Be sure about the identification of the garden symphylid. Do not guess. Compare suspected specimens with the description given below. In case of doubt, consult your county agent for help in obtaining definite information.

Description

Full-grown garden symphylids are 1/4 to 3/8 inch in length. They are light cream to white in color, except for a thin darker stripe where the contents of the intestine show through the body wall. There are twelve pairs of short legs along the sides. They have a pair of antenna or feelers on the head which are about one-third as long as the body, and a pair of short appendages on the rear of the body.

Young garden symphylids are smaller and have fewer legs but are similar in appearance to the full-grown ones. Minute white round eggs are laid underground in the runways in groups of 5 to 25 and hatch in 8 to 28 days. The young reach maturity in 3 to 6 months, depending on the temperature, and live for several years under favorable conditions.

Garden symphylids often come to the surface of wet soil during cloudy dark cool weather, but they disappear with the slightest disturbance. They are rarely seen on the surface of dry soil and move deeper into the ground as drying progresses. They may be exposed when infested soil is turned or a flower pot is emptied, but they will immediately hide themselves. They move quickly when disturbed but do not jump. The feelers on the head are easily visible and are usually in fast motion.

Injury

Garden symphylids eat the fine roots and tender root tips and feed on the surfaces of larger tender roots. Young seedlings or newly set plants usually suffer most from their attack. The root system will develop poorly or not at all because of the root pruning. Injured plants may wilt easily, show little or no growth, or die. Garden symphylids are most troublesome in outdoor areas and ground beds in greenhouses. They will infest plants in pots, and sometimes injure

plants on raised benches.

The garden symphylid will feed on many kinds of plants. Some of the ornamental plants it attacks are asters, astilbe, calendulas, carnations, chrysanthemums, gardenias, geranium, gladiolus, lilies, roses, snapdragons, and sweet peas.

Control

Lindane will kill the garden symphylid, and usually a single application at 4 pounds per acre will give good control. If control is not obtained in 2 weeks, make a second application at the same rate. Sprinkle the lindane evenly over the soil surface before the crop is planted, and thoroughly mix it into the top 3 to 6 inches. Use a dust, or use a wettable powder mixed with dry soil, sand, or water. Ten to 15 gallons of water per 500 square feet is usually convenient.

For either outdoor areas or greenhouse beds, use 5 pounds of a 1-percent lindane dust or 3 1/2 pounds of a 1.5-percent dust or 3 ounces of a 25-percent lindane wettable powder per 500 square feet of soil surface.

For potting soil use 8 ounces of a 1-percent dust, 5 1/2 ounces of a 1.5-percent dust, or 1/3 ounce of a 25-percent wettable powder per cubic yard of soil.

If you discover garden symphylids in planted areas, apply lindane at the dosages given above. Work the material into the soil by careful cultivation and wash it in by thorough watering.

If garden symphylids infest the soil of plants in flower pots, use 1/4 ounce of 25-percent lindane wettable powder in 20 gallons of water. Stir the mixture frequently to prevent the lindane from settling out. Fill the watering space in the pots with the mixture.

Except for initial control, do not use lindane more than once a year. Even annual applications are not necessary unless garden symphylids are present. Control measures two years in three or three years in four should be sufficient. Heavy soil, which is subject to less leaching, requires fewer applications than lighter sandy soil.

Annual applications of lindane at heavier dosages than suggested here have been used safely on roses, snapdragons, carnations, and chrysanthemums in field

plots and on 24 varieties of flower seedlings in pots. There has been a reduction in cormel production on gladiolus but no effect on corm production or flowering.

Caution

The flavor of certain food crops may be affected when grown in soil treated with lindane. Therefore, this material should not be used in soil in which food crops are to be grown within several years.

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