

Bell County Master Gardener
Tip of the Week
By Mary Lew Quesinberry
“ Pill bugs “

Question: I have so many pill bugs or roly-poly bugs eating everything in my garden. How do I get rid of these creatures?

Answer: I remember when we would play with the roly-polys when we were kids, because they roll into a ball when disturbed. Now we consider them pests! Pill bugs or roly-poly bugs (Isopods) are related to lobsters, shrimp and crabs. Pill bugs are attracted to gardens with organic matter, which is the sign of a healthy garden. They are like a cleanup crew feeding mostly on decomposing organic material. In large numbers they become pests, attacking the tender growth of young plants and even coming into the home.

Pill bugs are easily managed with a nontoxic bait product that is made with iron phosphate. Iron phosphate is an ingredient used in fertilizer. This product is advertised as slug and snail bait. Apply it in the evening around the area of infestation. After ingestion it causes the pill bugs not to eat and they die in a few days. It is safe for pets and wildlife. It will decompose harmlessly into the soil.

Diatomaceous Earth is another solution for pill bug control. It is a powder made from fossilized sea creatures. It has microscopic sharp edges that damage the protective covering of many pests (pill bugs, flea larvae, ants, cockroaches, aphids, thrips, earwigs, silverfish and more). The exoskeleton of the creature that crawls over the diatomaceous earth becomes broken (compromised) and the pest desiccates. Sprinkle the DE powder in the areas you want protected. Wear a dust mask when applying, as with any fine powder, it can irritate mucus membranes.

Have any questions about gardening in Central Texas? Contact ask.bcmga@gmail.com

In the photo: Garden spiders find the pill bug a yummy treat. Homeowners consider the roly-poly pill bug a pest. The pill bug is of the Isopod family related to crayfish. It dines on decomposing material and sometimes on young plants. It is easily controlled with natural products.

