

Earthworms do the lion's share of the decomposition work among the larger compost organisms. They are constantly tunneling and feeding on dead plants and decaying insects during the daylight hours. Their tunneling aerates the compost and enables water, nutrients and oxygen to filter down.



White or pot worms are small, white, threadlike worms found when there is a quantity of finished material. They are beneficial organisms that feed on decaying organic matter.



Millipedes are slower and more cylindrical than centipedes and have two pairs of legs on each body segment. They feed mainly on decaying plant tissue but will also ingest carcasses and excrement.



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Centipedes are fast moving predators found mostly in the top few inches of the compost heap. They have formidable claws behind their head which possess poison glands that paralyze small red worms, insect larvae, newly hatched earthworms, and arthropods - mainly insects and spiders.



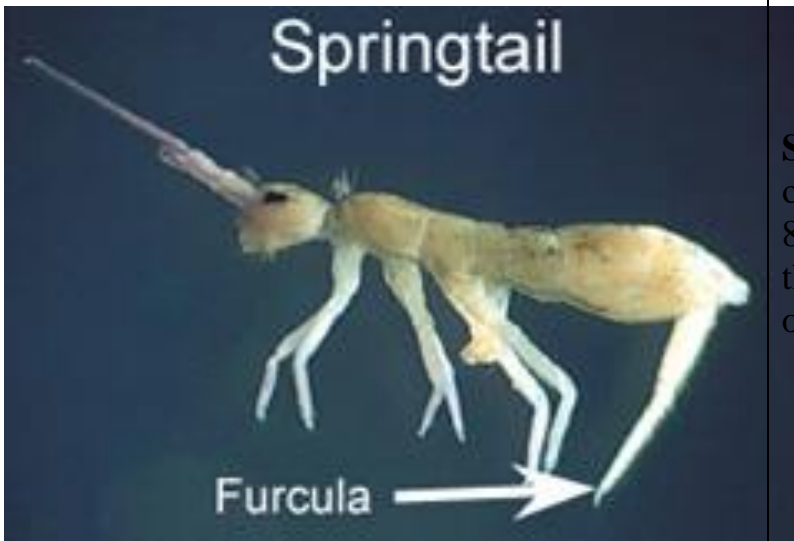
<http://www.californiabiota.com/cabiota/>

Sow and Pill bugs are considered omnivores, meaning they feed on both living and dead organic matter. They shred and consume some of the toughest material, those high in cellulose and lignin (tree parts and leaves).



Image by Paul Heller
PSU Dept. of Entomology

Green fruit fly larva feed on decaying fruit that is in your compost pile. They are easy to identify by their strange getaway strategy, which is to flip over on their back and use the tiny hairs located there to squirm away.



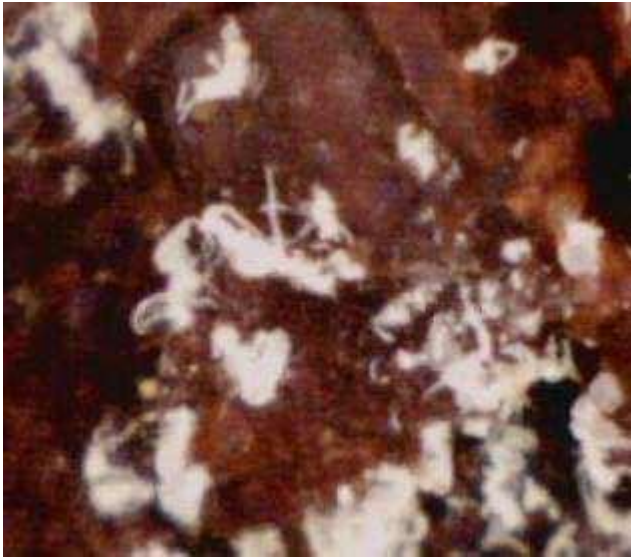
Springtails are primarily decomposers of organic matter. It's estimated that more than 80% of the organic matter on earth passes through the gut of a springtail or a sow bug on its journey to becoming topsoil.



Ants feed on aphid honey-dew, fungi, seeds, sweets, scraps, other insects and sometimes other ants. Compost provides some of these foods and it also provides shelter for nests and hills. Ants may benefit the compost heap by moving minerals especially phosphorus and potassium around by bringing fungi and other organisms into their nests.



Mites are among the most numerous inhabitants in the compost bin, with many different species feeding on decaying organic matter, fungi, and other organisms. They are generally found on the surface of the bin, though some predatory species will venture deeper if the material is loose and there is a food source.



Molds and fungi are common in a healthy compost bin. They feed on decaying organic matter with tiny, hair-like hyphae, secreting enzymes which break down and simplify the organic matter. They are also an additional food source to other organisms in the system, including earthworms.