

LIFE IN THE LEAF LITTER

Every fall leaves lie thick under the trees. By spring almost all the leaves have disappeared. They have been eaten, digested and turned into new soil by bacteria, fungi and many small animals. Hunt through the leaf litter to find some of these animals.



Ground Beetle - These fast runners often scurry away and hide in the soil debris. Most can eat anything (omnivores) using their sharp jaws.



Striped Woodlouse - A fast runner who hides away quickly. It is a crustacean decomposer and breathes with gills underneath its suit of armour.



Springtail - These very small (1mm) wingless decomposers with long antenna love moist habitats and can leap away from trouble using a forked spring underneath their abdomens.



Garden Slug - Black, brown or green, a slug is an important recycler of plant material but many will eat anything they find from dog food to some crushed relatives!



Garden Snail - Usually found tucked up in the litter during the day, these herbivores use their raspy tongue to scrape a living from leaves at night. Most face to the right but 10% are lefties!



Rove Beetle - These fast moving predators have a habit of pointing their tails up if disturbed. They hunt for small invertebrates at night.



Brown Centipede - These very fast runners are ferocious predators with poisonous jaws. They can easily move around inside the leafy debris.



Jumping Spider - Two large front facing eyes allow this little predator to catch prey by leaping upon it to use its poisonous bite. Short legs and a hairy body are good indicators of jumpers.



Woodlouse Hunter - This fierce looking spider has long fangs that can pierce the armour of wood lice and other tough prey. Definitely be careful when you find this creature.



Zebra Jumping Spider - Common wanderer beneath fences where it hunts on the fence or directly underneath it. Four equal legs and a stocky body allow them to jump several centimetres to capture prey.



Harvestman or Daddy Long Legs - These harmless spider relatives use their second pair of legs to tap and taste for water or food. They have a fused body with a turret for eyes and jaws on top.



Earthworm - A common find when looking in layers of damp leaves or wet soil litter. They need moisture to breathe through their skin.



Pseudoscorpion - These tiny predators are fierce looking but harmless to humans. Look carefully to find these fascinating spider relatives.



Millipede - With two pairs of legs per segment this slow moving cylindrical recycler can repel attackers by secreting poisonous gases or liquids into the mouths of predators. They often coil up when disturbed.



Pillbug - These land crustaceans are close cousins of the Woodlouse and can actually roll up into a little ball when threatened.



The Nature Exploration Club for Families www.naturekidsbc.ca