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Are you familiar with the garden symphylan?

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If you are a gardener in the Pacific Northwest, you need to know about this pest.

Symphylans are a pest largely found in the Pacific Northwest. Most gardening books are written for the east coast, with a climate entirely different than ours, and the symphylan is not an issue that is discussed. I've even gone into local gardening centers, asking the experts about symphylans, and been given nothing but a blank stare.

I first read about the symphylan in Steve Solomon's [1] book, and am reminded about the pest gain in The Resilient Gardener [2].

So, what is a symphylan? A symphylan is a tiny, centipede-like creature. It is white or translucent, about a quarter of an inch long.It is very difficult to see.

The damage that a symphylan does appears to the uninitiated gardener as a problem with soil, fertility, or lack of water. The damage that they do is eating away at the tender tips of of the plants. They also eat organic matter and thrive in irrigated soils.

Symphylans thrive where: winters are mild, there is a large amount of organic matter, and where there is abundant moisture.

Steve Solomon [1] says: "Symphylans are so small, so fast, and so well camouflaged that several dozen of them can be hiding in a shovelful of soil and yet only someone intently looking for them may ever realize their presence."

The symptoms of an infestation of symphylans are stunted plants and seeds failing to emerge. Evidently most gardeners will think that the problem is that the organic matter isn't high enough, and so the gardener will just import more organic matter and water more deeply and the problem only gets worse.

Unfortunately the only way to deal with the pests is long-term rotation with a cover crop. There is no chemical control, organic or not.

If you think you may have a garden symphylan problem, I encourage you read Vegetable Gardening West of the Cascades [1]. This article [3] through the National Sustainable Agriculture Service is also quite helpful, with many photographs.

Stop on by my homesteading blog [4] to connect with me.

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