

Earwigs



These reddish-brown insects measure from $\frac{1}{4}$ to $1\frac{1}{4}$ inch in length, with short wings and forceps-like appendages at the end of the abdomen. The appendages of the female are smaller and less curved than those of the male. While some species are wingless, they are able to travel great distances in plant materials and often in other freight.

This insect has been labeled a "pest" chiefly because of its habit of concealing itself in and around houses. It may often be found in household articles, foodstuffs, and crawl spaces. It is very destructive to garden vegetables and flowers and occasionally tree fruit.

The earwig is omnivorous. It will consume fungi, mosses, insects, spiders and mites (dead or alive). Plant material constitutes the bulk of its diet. It will leave numerous, small holes in the plant's leaves. It may also tunnel into ripe apples, prunes and peaches.

While it is noted that the earwig may be destructive, it also serves as part of the garden "clean-up crew," helping to transform garden debris into useful humus. Problems occur where there are large infestations.

The name "earwig" originated in Europe and is based upon a popular, but totally unfounded, superstition that earwigs enter the ears of sleeping persons and bore into the brain. They are harmless to humans except for the minor nip that they can inflict with their appendages when disturbed.

This insect was not known in the United States prior to 1900. It is native to Europe, western Asia, and northern Africa. In North America it was first reported in the Pacific Northwest, Rhode Island and eastern Massachusetts. It is now found throughout the northeastern states and the west coast north of central California.

Earwigs develop from eggs to adult via gradual metamorphosis which is temperature dependent. The eggs are laid in the fall and spring, in the upper 2 to 3 inches of soil. Females and some males will survive the winter. Each female lays 20 to 50 small white eggs. After hatching in spring, the white nymphs may be found in the soil. As they get larger, they change to a greenish color and begin foraging at night. They mature in late summer.

Since the problem originates outdoors, control should begin there. The effectiveness of any chemical control may be enhanced by removing debris which shelters any earwigs. EB1206E indicates that control can be obtained by use of extensive insecticide programs using Sevin as a spray or bait, or Dursban as a spray or granular treatment, or bendiocarb as a dust. Be sure to follow all product labels. Apply on ground or earwig hiding places only. For inside control, use aerosol insecticides registered for indoor use. Indoor treatment usually consists of residual spraying of baseboards, and other hiding places at floor level. They can also be vacuumed up.

References

[European Earwig Prevention and Control](#). Washington State University Extension Service, EB 1206E, March 2003.

[Earwigs](#).

[Earwigs. An Occasional Invader](#).

Brenel, Kathleen N. *Sunset Western Garden Problem Solver*, Sunset Books Inc. Menlo Park, CA 1998, p. 168.