

EARWIGS

European earwigs are common pests that feed on a variety of garden plants as well as decaying vegetation. Earwigs are distinct in appearance with mature insects being dark brown and averaging three quarters of an inch long. Most distinctive is a pincer-like appendage on the rear end of the insect. Despite their name, earwigs do not breed in people's ears and are harmless. If you grab one, however, it may pinch you back!

Typical injury to plants appear as numerous small, irregular holes in the leaves of plants. Damage occurs at night, as earwigs are nocturnal. Favored plants include: beans, potatoes, beets, cabbage, cauliflower, peas, dahlias, zinnia, Sweet William, and marigolds.

Female earwigs lay their eggs in the soil in early spring. By mid-summer, the eggs have matured and earwigs may be present in huge numbers. Earwigs are semi-social and the females guard their egg clutches and the young earwigs until they wander away.

Earwig control is difficult. Ideal conditions for earwigs are humidity, shade, organic material, and cracks and crevasses to hide in during the day. Earwig populations may explode during rainy and humid summers. With these greatly increased numbers, they may enter the home through any holes. They do no damage there and can be controlled manually by a thorough weatherproofing to keep them out in the first place. Outdoors, applications of insecticidal sprays to daytime hiding areas or to specific crops the earwigs are attacking may give some control. These insects, however, seem to be resistant to many common pesticides. Minimizing their hiding places may be a more feasible alternative for many people.

Michigan State University Extension, Master Gardener Training Manual, Household Pests, P 19 and 20.

The **Master Gardener Hotline** is open from April to October, Monday through Friday. Lines are available 9:00 am to noon and 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm at 888-678-3464

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