

## FACT SHEET



# EARWIG

## PREVENTION & CONTROL

### MEET THE PEST

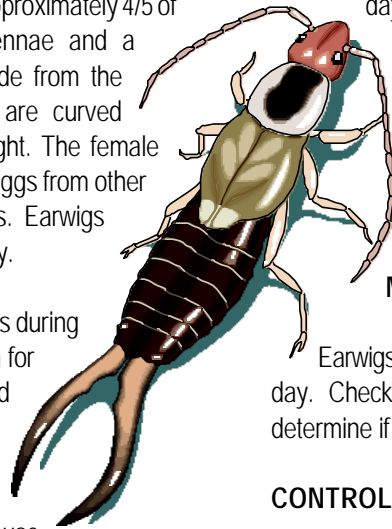
Earwigs are a common garden insect that occasionally become a household nuisance when they go indoors in search of moisture. Earwigs are also accidentally carried into houses on humans, clothing, vegetables, newspapers, etc. European earwigs, the most common species in the Atlantic Provinces, are reddish-brown, approximately 4/5 of an inch (2 cm) long with long antennae and a noticeable set of pincers which protrude from the abdomen. The pincers of the male are curved whereas those of the female are straight. The female uses her pincers to protect herself and eggs from other insects, but they cannot harm humans. Earwigs have wings but they are rarely used to fly.

Earwigs typically hide in dark, moist areas during the day and come out at night to search for food. They feed on decaying plant and animal matter and can also cause slug-like damage to garden plants such as flowers, fruits and vegetables. One way to determine if a slug or earwig is the cause of damage is to look for the slimy substance that slugs leave behind. Earwigs also damage vegetables by entering and enlarging existing holes caused by other insects and diseases.

Earwig damage in the garden is usually not severe. Also it is important to note that earwigs are an important predator of garden insects, including pest insects such as aphids. As a result, earwigs should be tolerated as much as possible. Indoors, earwigs are primarily a nuisance and will usually die off on their own. However, the presence of earwigs indoors may be an indication of a moisture problem.

### LIFE CYCLE

The life cycle of the earwig consists of egg, nymph and adult. In early spring, after overwintering in soil, the female earwig lays up to 60 eggs near the surface of the soil. In about seven days, the eggs hatch and nymphs emerge. The nymphs are similar to adults, only smaller. Over a 70 day period, the nymphs pass through four growth stages before becoming an adult. Egg laying can take place twice per year (spring and summer). Adult earwigs are most noticeable in July, August and September. Earwigs live for approximately one year, but most often the males die during the winter months.



### MONITORING

Earwigs are active at night and often hide during the day. Check your garden at night with a flashlight to determine if earwigs are present and causing damage.

### CONTROL

#### Physical

Prevent earwig infestations in the garden by removing debris and leaf litter which attract them. As well, move compost piles, grass clippings and fire wood stacks away from gardens and flower beds. If earwigs are damaging your plants, there are some physical control measures available.

Earwig traps are easy to construct and very economical. Take a rolled up newspaper, a piece of corrugated cardboard or a paper towel tube filled with straws and seal it on one end. Place it in an area of the garden where earwigs have been observed. When the earwigs crawl inside, it is next to impossible for them to escape.

A bait of honey or peanut butter can be used to attract earwigs to these traps, but it is not necessary. Another trapping method is to place a shallow dish or tin can in a hole in the ground so that the top of it is at ground level. If a tin can is used, an empty tuna or sardine can with oil remaining on the inside works best. In the morning, check the traps and shake all captured earwigs into a bucket of soapy water.

Earwigs may be found indoors during hot, dry summers. To limit the number of earwigs entering the house, shake and examine all objects, including cut flowers and vegetables, before bringing them inside. Seal cracks and check window openings and doors.

### **Chemical**

If physical control measures are not effective, use a pesticide which will have a minimal impact on both you and the environment. It is easier to treat earwigs during the nymph stage. Insecticidal soaps and diatomaceous earth are available as a pesticidal control.

If the above measures are not effective, consult with an expert at a garden center for additional pesticides available to treat earwigs.

**Always use a registered domestic class pest control product labeled for earwig control and carefully follow the label directions.**

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