



Earwigs

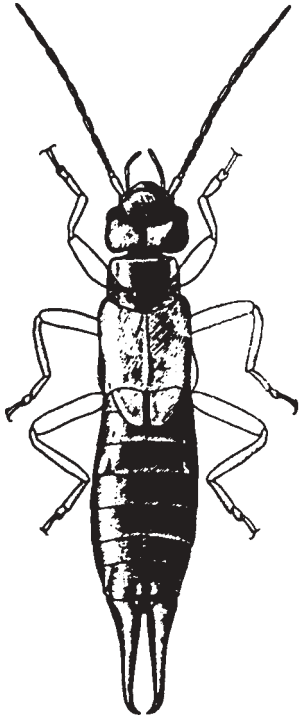


Fig. a adult female

Introduction

The European earwig is a common pest of the home and garden in New England. This insect can also be quite destructive to home and garden plants. Earwigs have a foul odor and invariably show up in unwanted places, such as around the kitchen or bathroom.

Description and life cycle

The adult European earwig is reddish brown and resembles certain beetles. Unlike other insects, it has a pair of forceps-like appendages on the end of the body, which can be used to determine the sex of an individual (see figure b). Earwigs use forceps as a defense organ and an aid in mating. The wings of earwigs are very short, exposing the abdomen, and are seldom used for flying. The antennae are slender and very flexible. Young earwigs resemble the adult female but are smaller and lighter in color.

In New England earwigs overwinter in the adult stage. In early spring the female lays eggs in a nest in the ground and carefully guards them until they hatch. She will then brood her young until they are capable of caring for themselves. There are usually about 30 young in a brood.

During the day earwigs are inactive and hide in a variety of places in and around the house, such as in wet mops, flower pots and woodpiles, behind loose boards, at the base of trees and in shrubbery. They become active at night and roam about feeding on a variety of houseplants and organic materials, such as kitchen waste.

In the garden they may damage dahlias, zinnias, butterfly bush, lettuce, strawberry, celery, potatoes and seedling beans and beets. You can also find them in ears of corn, feeding on the silks.

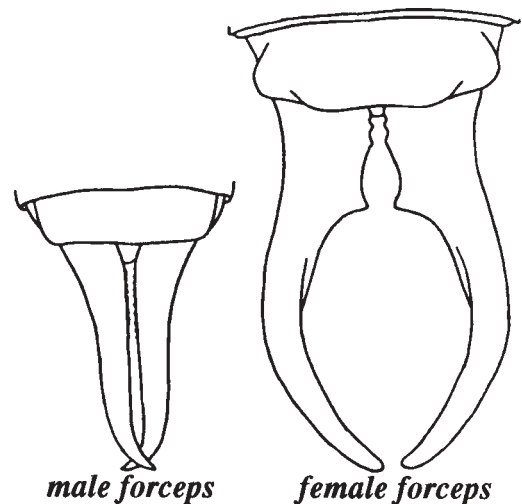


Fig. b

male forceps

female forceps

Control

Non-chemical control

Since earwigs are chiefly outdoor insects, eliminating outdoor habitats such as woodpiles, leaves and debris next to the house will discourage their presence. Inside the home, earwigs can be swept up and discarded. Food stored in the cellar may attract earwigs and should be moved or placed in metal containers.

Chemical control

For controlling insects the house, select a pesticide that lists outdoor crawling insects on the label. Apply to areas around the foundation of the house where you see earwigs. Treat the entire infested area except where indicated in the precautions stated on the label. Apply in the spring as the young earwigs are leaving their nests and again in midsummer if earwigs are troublesome.

In case of severe infestation, earwigs may need to be controlled indoors. Select a pesticide labeled for indoor crawling insects. Be sure to follow the directions on the label. Be careful not to contaminate food.

***Stop!** This publication contains pesticide recommendations that are subject to change at any time. UNH Cooperative Extension provides these recommendations only as a guide. It is always the pesticide applicator's responsibility, by law, to read and follow all current label directions for the specific pesticide being used. Because of constantly changing labels and product registration, some of the recommendations offered in this publication may no longer be legal by the time you read them. Contact the NH Division of Pesticide Control at (603) 271-3550 to check registration status. If any information in these recommendations disagrees with the label, you must disregard the recommendations and follow the label directions. No endorsement is intended for products mentioned, nor criticism intended for products not mentioned.*

*Store pesticides in their original containers in a locked cabinet or shed away from food. Dispose of unused pesticides or empty containers safely, according to NH regulations. If you suspect pesticide poisoning, call the New Hampshire Poison Control Center at **1-800-562-8236**.*

Reviewed by Dr. Stanley Swier, Extension Entomologist, 10/01

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