

Earwigs (*Forficula auricularia*)



Figure 1 Adult male earwig, approx. 5/8" long



Figure 2 Earwig damage on common mallow

Damage

Earwigs are scavengers, feeding on damaged and decaying plant matter and weakened or dead insects and other small organisms. Larger plants can usually tolerate earwig feeding, but seedlings and flowering plants cannot and may be severely damaged or killed. Look for a scattering of black earwig excrement around the damaged plants (looks like poppy seeds). Sometimes earwig damage can be mistaken for slug damage. Slugs leave a slime trail. Earwigs do not.

When Are They Active

Earwigs are most active at night. They hide during the day in dark, confined, damp areas such as under potted plants, leaves, mats, wood piles, mulch. You might see the first earwig in early June. Wet springs and summers intensify earwig infestations.

Susceptible Plants

Their preferred flowers are marigolds, dahlias, butterfly bush, roses, and hostas. They will also feed on celery, lettuce, tender greens, potatoes, strawberries, raspberries, peaches, and herbs, **especially basil**, and corn silk and seedlings.

Prevention Methods

Clean up debris that harbor earwigs, such as leaves, plant litter, bricks, piles of lumber and wood, stones from your garden space. Avoid using thick organic mulches, planting susceptible plants, and overwatering. Frequent, shallow disruption of soil in early spring will disrupt and destroy nests and eggs.

Treatment Methods

Trap earwigs by placing clean shallow tuna or cat food cans filled halfway with vegetable oil around susceptible plants. Make sure level of oil is about 1 inch below edge of the container. Loosely rolled moistened newspaper, secured at both ends with rubber bands and placed near susceptible plants, make good traps. Bait with wheat germ or wheat bran before rolling. Place rolled paper near susceptible plantings in the evening. In the morning collect the rolls, seal in a plastic bag and dispose. Sprinkle food grade diatomaceous earth around the base of affected or susceptible plants.

Additional Information/Resources

- University of Minnesota Extension [European earwigs in homes and gardens](#)
- UW Extension Bulletin [A3640 Controlling earwigs](#)
- University of Maryland Extension [Earwigs](#)
- Dane County UW Extension Horticulture Hotline [608-224-3721](#) (M-F, 9 am-12 noon, April 15 – October 31) or horticulture@countyofdane.com
- Arizona Cooperative Extension Pest Press [Diatomaceous Earth](#)

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