

# Earwigs

## *Forficula* spp.

<b>Order:</b>	Dermaptera (earwigs)
<b>Family:</b>	Forficulidae (European and spine-tailed earwigs)
<b>Metamorphosis:</b>	Simple (egg-nymph-adult)
<b>Mouthparts:</b>	Chewing in nymphs and adults



**EARWIGS**, *Forficula* spp., see color print, Fig. 16, on publication B-1013.

Earwigs occasionally damage young plantings and infest ears of corn. They are also considered beneficial because they break down organic matter in the soil. The most common species in the region is *Forficula auricularia*.

### Body Form

**Eggs:** Eggs are approximately 1/16 inch in length and are white or cream in color.

**Nymphs:** Nymphs have a forcep-like cerci extending from their last abdominal segment. Because of this character, they are sometimes referred to as “pincher bugs.” They are dorso-ventrally flattened and are dark brown. Rudimentary wing buds may be visible.

**Adults:** Adult earwigs may be winged or wingless. They have the same general body form, coloration, and markings as the nymphs. Adult males have distinctly curved forcep-like cerci and 10 abdominal segments. Adult females have eight abdominal segments and straightened forcep-like cerci. Adult earwigs are approximately ½ inch in length.

### Life History

Earwigs overwinter as adults in various sheltered areas including plant debris, crevices in wood bark, and wood piles. In early spring, females lay clusters of eggs in cells in the ground or in plant debris. The females will protect their eggs until the young nymphs emerge. Both adults and nymphs are active at night. They can be found during the day in crevices in the soil, the bark of trees, or in plant debris.

### Plant Injury and Benefits

Generally, earwigs feed on decaying vegetable matter and other organic matter in the soil. In this activity, they are considered beneficial. However, they are opportunistic feeders and can damage living plants. Earwigs have caused occasional but considerable damage to vegetable crops, cereals, ornamentals, and

fruit trees. In home garden production they can reduce stands of young plants by cutting into tender stems. In home gardens and the crop production of corn, they can be found in large numbers feeding on silk and developing kernels. Nymphs and adults can be found feeding on the nectaries of flowers, causing the petals to drop prematurely.

## **Management**

The most practical control strategy for earwigs includes a combination of preventative measures. Routine sanitation practices must be consistently implemented. Decaying plant matter and weeds should be eliminated because they may be potential sources of earwig infestation. In home gardens, avoid creating a soil environment of high organic matter and moisture content. Unusually heavy infestation may warrant chemical control.

---

*Issued in furtherance of cooperative extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Glen Whipple, director, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Wyoming, Laramie, Wyoming 82071.*

*Persons seeking admission, employment, or access to programs of the University of Wyoming shall be considered without regard to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability, age, political belief, veteran status, sexual orientation, and marital or familial status. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication or program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact their local UW CES office. To file a complaint, write to the UW Employment Practices/Affirmative Action Office, University of Wyoming, 1000 E. University Ave., Department 3434, Laramie, WY 82071-3434.*