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Eerie Earwigs!

Due to the drought, we are seeing more and more earwigs in and around structures. Earwigs have flattened bodies that allow them to gain entrance into structures. Once indoors, however, they do not reproduce. They are rarely harmful to humans, but they do have a pincer-like appendage at the end of their abdomen. This appendage can pinch human skin, but earwigs will not enter the ears and bore into the brain like some people may believe.

Earwigs are 1/4 to 1-1/4 inches in length. Their color varies from brown to black, with some species having yellow or buff-colored stripes or a reddish coloring on the head and body. All earwigs have a pair of hardened abdominal appendages at the end of the abdomen and a short pair of leathery wings and a second pair of membranous wings folded underneath the leathery pair.

A few species of earwigs can damage crops and ornamental plants due to their chewing mouthparts. However most are beneficial, since they feed on living and dead insects. Earwigs found indoors feed on house plants or sweet or oily foods.

Earwigs forage at night and they are usually attracted to lights. They tend to be found in areas of moisture and will invade structures during droughts, so they can find a cool, moist shelter. During the winter, earwigs will dig into the ground as deep as 6 feet in order to escape the freezing temperatures.

Some Control Options:

Non-Chemical Control Options:

- 1) Eliminate any accumulations of moisture, such as in crawl spaces, around faucets, air conditioning units.
- 2) Reduce lawn and flower bed watering as much as possible.
- 3) Remove places that attract earwigs such sheltered areas under trash or compost piles.
- 4) Reduce outside lights at night, since these tend to attract earwigs.
- 5) Caulking and applying weatherstripping around doors, windows, pipes and other places will prevent earwig invasion.

Chemical Control Options:

- 1) Use insecticides outdoors in such areas as around foundations and flower beds. Insecticidal sprays and granules can be used, such as those containing carbaryl and pyrethrins.
- 2) Since earwig populations do not establish indoors, spot treatments to baseboards, behind draperies, carpet edges, in cabinets, door and window frames are advised.



Photo of ring-legged earwig, *Euborellia annulipes* (Lucas)(Dermaptera: Carcinophoridae). Photo by Bart Drees, Texas A&M University.

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