

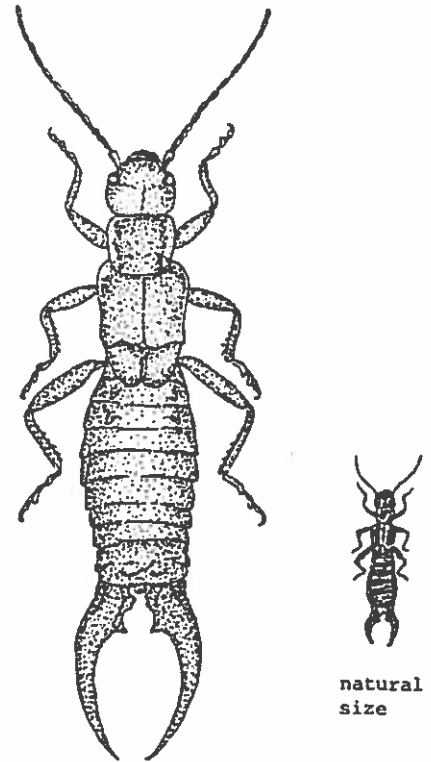
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EARWIGS

Identification: This dark, shiny, reddish brown insect with its formidable pincers can scarcely be confused with any others in this region. The name earwig is probably derived from ear wing which refers to the shape of the wings and has nothing to do with human ears or wigs. There are two or three other species of earwigs in this area but they are much smaller (less than 10 mm long) and are rarely encountered.

Occurrence: The European Earwig was introduced into port cities on both coasts of North America in the early 1900's and has been a problem in Ontario in the late 1930's and in St. John's, Newfoundland in the 1950's. This insect first appeared in Halifax in the late 1960's but did not become common in this area until 1975. It is usually considered a garden pest but, because of its fondness for cracks and crevices, it can also become a nuisance around windows and doorways. Its presence indoors should not cause undue alarm for, unlike fleas and bedbugs, earwigs do not bite humans. The pincers are not poisonous but are used to fend off enemies such as spiders and ground beetles. A male is shown in the drawing; the female's pincers are straighter and are usually held close together.



Forficula auricularia Linnaeus

Habits: Earwigs hide by day and are active at night when they forage for food, usually vegetable matter; they also feed on small insects and mites. They can fly using a pair of ear-shaped wings which are normally kept folded under the short wing covers.

Life history: Earwigs spend the winter in cavities just below the surface of the ground or in rotten logs. Males and females pair off in individual cells, the male leaving the cell in mid-winter and the female staying to tend the eggs and young. The eggs hatch after two months and the young nymphs leave the cell to fend for themselves after their first moult. They reach maturity in July. A second, later brood may be reared which reaches maturity in September.

Control measures: If earwigs become a problem in the garden or indoors the first thing to do is to remove their daytime refuges such as litter on the ground and piles of rotten wood; in other words, clean up the yard. The most effective control method involves the use of poisoned bait which is mixed as follows: 12 ounces of Sodium fluoride or Sodium silicofluoride are dissolved in a little water and mixed with 2 quarts of molasses. The resulting liquid is then mixed through 12 pounds of wheat bran to give a moist sawdust-like product. This bait is sprinkled around outside the house, paying particular attention to the foundation wall and places where leaves, etc., accumulate. There should be two applications, the first at dusk in July when earwigs first become numerous and the second about a week later. Caution: the bait is poisonous to birds and domestic animals. Wherever possible use patches of bait covered by sheets of cardboard or garbage bags.

Barry Wright
October, 1975