

European Earwig



European earwig
(male)
Actual length =
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Injury. European earwigs generally feed as scavengers on dead insects and rotting plant material. A few cases of earwigs feeding on aphids have been reported, and they will also attack flower blossoms, lettuce and other succulent garden plants.

In addition to their feeding activities, earwigs often occur in close proximity to people, even getting into houses and garages, especially during periods of very wet weather. In the home they are attracted to paper and fiber products stored in moist situations and thus may be found in basements, kitchens, and occasionally in bathrooms.

Description. The European earwig was known only from a few localities east of the Mississippi River in 1940. These sites were in the coastal areas of Massachusetts and Rhode Island and in upstate New York near the Great Lakes – a total of 12 observations. By 1970, only a few scattered counties in New York had not been reported as having serious infestations. The

insect is also reported in neighboring counties of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Connecticut, Massachusetts and Vermont. Reports of annoyance and damage increase each year. The European earwig has been known widely on the West Coast since the early 1900s and has moved eastward to the Plains states.

The adult is about 19 mm (3/4") long, a somewhat flattened elongate insect, dark red-brown in color with short wing covers. It seldom flies. The young are similar to the adults, grey-brown in color, and lacking wings. The most distinctive feature of earwigs is the pair of forceps on the tip of the abdomen. On the male the forceps are strongly curved, in the female they are nearly straight.

Life History. The female earwig deposits up to 300 white, nearly spherical eggs in a cell in the soil at a depth to 15mm. Depending on temperature, incubation lasts from 12 to 85 days, eggs laid early in the spring requiring the longest to hatch. The female guards the eggs and newly hatched young, but abandons the brood after the first molt. Nearly a year is required for development, and there is one generation per year. Both eggs and young require moisture, but heavy rains are not tolerated. The adults can survive extended periods of dryness.

(over)

