CORNELL Cooperative Extension of Chemung County



European Earwig

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.

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Management. When earwigs are numerous outdoors, invasions of the home can be expected. A barrier of the insecticide Baygon or malathion around the house is effective. Indoors, Baygon, resmethrin or tetramethrin are recommended. The pesticide should be prepared and applied only according to label instructions.

Invasions of the home can be limited by removing damp articles and debris and by taking measures to dry out moist areas. Block openings with screening or caulking in areas where earwigs may enter. Moist leaf mold and mulches should be kept away from the foundation, especially near window wells and doorways.

Every effort has been made to provide correct, complete, and up-to-date pest management information for New York State. Changes in pesticide regulations occur constantly, and human errors are still possible. These recommendations are not a substitute for pesticide labeling. Read the label before applying any pesticide. Trade names used herein are for convenience only. No endorsement of products is intended, nor is criticism of unnamed products implied.

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