

Earwigs

While their prominent tail-end pincers might look ferocious, earwigs aren't harmful to people.

Earwigs can seriously damage seedling vegetables and chew holes in annual flowers, soft fruit, and corn silks, but earwigs also play a beneficial role by feeding on aphids and other insects. Earwigs feed at night and hide during the day in dark, cool, moist places in the yard or within flowers or vegetables. To manage earwigs, reduce hiding places and moisture, and employ a vigilant trapping program.



Adult earwig on strawberry.

Should you be concerned about earwigs in your garden?



Damage caused by earwigs.

- Yes, if you are growing vegetables, herbaceous flowering plants, sweet corn, or plants with soft fruits such as strawberries and apricots.
- No, if your garden is primarily lawn, trees, and woody ornamentals or native plants.

Reduce outdoor hiding places.

- Eliminate dense undergrowth of vines, ground cover, and weeds around vegetable and flower gardens.
- Prune away fruit tree suckers.
- Remove leaves, boards, boxes, trash, and other debris from planting areas.
- Move flower pots and other garden objects and structures that can harbor earwigs.
- Check plastic or organic mulches and remove them to limit earwig numbers.

Trap earwigs until they're gone!

- Trap earwigs with rolled newspaper, bamboo tubes, or short pieces of hose. Place these traps on the soil near plants just before dark, and shake accumulated earwigs into a pail of soapy water in the morning.
- Fill a low-sided can with vegetable oil and a drop of bacon grease or fish oil to attract and trap earwigs.
- Daily trapping will reduce earwig populations to tolerable levels.



Earwig trap made from low-sided can filled with vegetable oil.

What other ways can I control earwigs outside?

- Drip irrigate where possible to reduce surface moisture.
- Keep earwigs out of stone fruit trees with a band of sticky substance such as Tanglefoot around the trunk, and harvest fruit as soon as it ripens.
- Insecticides should rarely be needed.

How can I control earwigs inside my home?

Earwigs might seek refuge indoors when conditions outside are too dry, too hot, or too cold. Large numbers of earwigs can be annoying but present no health hazard. If earwigs invade your home, follow these steps:

- Sweep up or vacuum invading earwigs.
- Seal cracks or other entry points.
- Remove debris from gutters and around entryways.
- Keep water and moisture away from structures.
- Replace white outdoor lights with yellow ones, which are less attractive to earwigs.
- Indoor applications of pesticides aren't recommended.

What you do in your home and landscape affects our water and health.

- Minimize the use of pesticides that pollute our waterways and harm human health.
- Use nonchemical alternatives or less toxic pesticide products whenever possible.
- Read product labels carefully and follow instructions on proper use, storage, and disposal.

For more information about managing pests, visit ipm.ucanr.edu or your local University of California Cooperative Extension office.