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Earwigs: Earwigs

Use Integrated Pest Management (IPM) for successful plant problem management.

Biology

So named because of their alleged occurrence in people's ears! This may have occurred 500 years ago when people slept on the damp ground, where earwigs live. The ear of a twenty-first century human is unlikely to be the dark, damp place an earwig comes across today! The introduced European earwig (*Forficula auricularia*) is found in most gardens and is an omnivore feeding on small insects (especially aphids and small caterpillars) as well as flower petals and leaves. About ½ inch in length, it is nocturnal and at moderate population levels probably does far more good than bad in most gardens.

Prey or Pest Targeted

~ Aphids, mites, thrips, leafhoppers, centipedes, millipedes, caterpillars, insect eggs, whiteflies

Attracting and Keeping Beneficial Insects in Your Yard

- ~ Avoid regular use of synthetic, broad-spectrum pesticides. Infrequent use of certain narrow-spectrum pesticides is more compatible with some beneficials but generally the less chemical inputs there are, the greater and more diverse the beneficial insect community will be. Extensive lawns are also not conducive to attracting and retaining a diversity of beneficial insects, mites and spiders. Minimize lawn areas and maximize shrub and bush plantings. Many beneficials reside naturally in riparian and other 'natural' areas near to many back yards. Natural dispersion from these refuges ensures that some beneficials will visit back yards but they will not stay unless food, host and shelter resources are available. Native plants have closer affinities with native insects and therefore provide most of these resources. A garden with a good diversity of local native flora in and around back yards, will improve the abundance and diversity of local, beneficial arthropods. Native flora also provides natural overwintering sites for many beneficial insects and it is useful to leave at least a small area of native vegetation undisturbed during fall and winter.
- ~ Some kinds of beneficial insects (e.g. lady beetles, lacewings, predatory mites) are available for purchase from commercial suppliers. However, benefits from introducing these beneficials are usually limited and short-lived. Upon release, commercially obtained lady beetles and lacewings often disperse and may rapidly leave your backyard despite the presence of prey and suitable nectar resources. Generally, it is more effective and sustainable to create a garden habitat that will be colonized by beneficials naturally.

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Images



~ Caption: European earwing (*Forficula auricularia*) (Dermaptera)
~ Photo by: D.G. James



~ Caption: An adult European earwig
~ Photo by: M. Bush