

## WHAT'S BUGGIN' YOU?

# Forget the myths about earwig dangers

By TOM THOMPSON  
SPECIAL WRITER

It's that time of year again! The time when hundreds of people call their local pest control companies throughout Michigan to ask the same question: "What is this insect that I'm seeing that is about 1 1/4 inches long and has two pincers at the back end?"

Here's a chance to get one step ahead of your neighbor. The insect is an earwig.

This common name comes from a totally unfounded superstition that these insects crawl into people's ears at night to bite them. More gullible people believed that once this insect gained access to the human ear, it could bore into the brain. I have heard many different stories that are directly related to these insects. Having a very superstitious grandmother, I remember her saying to use a pillow so the earwigs wouldn't bite.

The earwig's order (group) contains some 1,100 species worldwide and only about 20 species exist in North America. The most common is the "European earwig." It is believed to have been carried over on ships from European countries during the turn of the century. It was first observed in 1907, in Seattle, Wash. Now it is found throughout most of the United States and Canada.

All earwigs have slender, flattened bodies (half-inch to 1 1/4 inch long) with beadlike antennae, a pair of very large pincers (or cerci) at the tip of the abdomen. The forcep-like cerci are both defensive and offensive weapons that are used occasionally to capture prey. The cerci don't contain venom nor do they sting. Many people have been misled to think they do.

Earwigs are a very non-aggressive insect, although if someone were to sit on one, he or she may get pinched. The pinch may cause a very mild irritation. Some species will squirt a foul-smelling liquid through their repugnatory gland as a defense against a possible intruder.

The adult earwig mates in early fall. The female then over-winters underground. In the spring, the female will produce one brood of around 30 to 50 eggs that will hatch in about 70 days. Hatching usually occurs around May or June. The female earwig is very matur-

nal. She tends to her young in the nest by cleaning and feeding them continuously. In late spring/early summer, they emerge from the nest and molt generally two times.

Earwigs are plant eaters. They feed on a variety of plants. Injury to plants is low and widely distributed because of this. When these insects feed on plants they make small irregular holes in the leaves, usually preferring green plants.

Earwigs are night feeders and crawl into any available hiding place at the approach of day. They are frequently disturbed when objects are moved such as patio furniture, grills and garden hoses. Damp and cool locations are the earwig's favorite hiding place. They also are found entering those areas within the home.

The first step in control is to remove unnecessary plant debris. Boards, planks and objects laying in or around the home should be moved out of shaded areas. Downspouts also should be extended so that the moist conditions can be minimized. Replace leaky outdoor faucets. Keep the hose assembly off the ground and drained. Remember, these insects are drawn to damp, cool areas. If possible, trim trees to allow sun to dry out these areas. If you have a pool, keep towels up and off the deck or ground. Store pool equipment in a dry place.

If you continue to see a significant amount of earwigs, then a pesticide treatment is the next option. Treat around the outside of the home with a liquid or granular application. Remember to read and follow the label directions. Make sure that the product is labeled for earwig control. I, personally, like the hose-end sprayer that attaches to your garden hose. Using this with a liquid Diazinon or Malathion produces a very thorough spray. Remember to spray in and around the plants and ivy.

Important: Don't spray around vegetable gardens without first reading the product label. You should re-spray again as the label directs. Treat in the fall as well when the insect will again try to over-winter for the next season.

Tom Thompson is owner of Thompson's Pest Control in Livonia and Plymouth.

## Buffalo grass needs little care

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Buffalo grass could be just the thing for those who want a lawn that requires minimum care, according to University of Nebraska-Lincoln researchers.

Although buffalo grass has a comparatively short green season it doesn't have to be mowed, fertilized or watered. It has become a major lawn grass in some southern cities, said Terry Riordan of UNL's Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

The university has been planting it around the Lincoln campus for 15 years or so, and city government and Lincoln Public Schools are testing some of the newer varieties.

One drawback is buffalo grass will not green up until around May 1, and it will turn dormant and brown around Sept. 15. However, during hot, dry spells it holds up better than fescue or bluegrass.

Riordan said buffalo grass is in short supply and also is more expensive than other varieties.

## Save Energy. Sit In Front Of The TV.



"Our House," a home energy-efficiency show brought to you by Detroit Edison, has some timely suggestions that can help you lower your energy bills. Starting August 6, watch "Our House," Sundays at 11:00 a.m. on UPN 50.

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