



Earwigs and Slugs, Pests I Have Had.

By Carol Quish, UConn Home and Garden Education Center

Two pests in my garden that are most bothersome for me are earwigs and slugs. Both start fairly early in the season, consuming on both seeds and seedlings. Larger transplants can also be damaged by their feeding resulting in holes in the leaves. I find both these creatures in vegetable as well as in perennial gardens. Both critters tend to be nocturnal, doing most of their damage at night, while hiding from the drying effects of the sun during the day.

Earwigs are easily identified by spotting their pair of ‘pinchers’ on the end of their body. Technically this structure is called cerci. The cerci are used for defense and in mating. Earwigs will pinch your hand if you pick them up, but they do not seek you out to do so. The males have larger and more curved cerci than the smaller females. These insects are brown in color and $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch long at maturity. The head end sports a pair of longer antennae. They also have a pair of short, stubby wing covers located towards the top of their abdomen, making them not set up for flying very well.

Typically earwigs crawl as means of transportation. Earwigs have gradual metamorphosis and produce only one generation per year. A few adults may overwinter, but the bulk of the population hatches in spring from eggs deposited in nests in the soil the previous fall. The newly hatched nymphs are white in color, darkening to brown as they grow larger.

Search for earwigs during the day while they are resting. Look under boards or dead leaves, and inside flower petals. Shake flower heads over a container of soapy water to dislodge the earwigs and kill them. Sticky tape with the sticky part facing out and wrapped around a hand or hoe helps to catch them. Toss the tape and insects into the trash. Set traps made from an empty cardboard tube with one end covered with dark tape. Stuff the tube lightly with a half sheet of crumpled newspaper. Stick a foot-long stick into the ground. Place the prepared tube onto the stick with the open end facing downward. The earwigs will climb up into the newspaper to rest during the day. In the morning take the tube off the stick and shake the earwigs out into the bucket of soapy water. Diatomaceous earth (DE) is a natural product that may be spread on the ground around vulnerable plants. The DE is sharp and will cut open the underside of the insect as it crawls over it. Reapply after rain. Chemical controls are not recommended for earwigs.

Slugs are the other nemesis in my garden. They are not an insect; they are a mollusk. A slug is a snail without a shell and related to oysters and clams. Slugs, like earwigs, travel and feed at night. They do leave a silvery slime trail which aids them in moving about. The slime makes them sticky to touch, so I like to use kitchen tongs or wear gloves for collecting them to drop in the soapy bucket. Also, like earwigs, they hide under wood or debris during daylight hours. Set traps of old carpet squares or pieces of wood for them to seek out the dark and protected places. Half melon or orange rinds work well, too.

Slugs can be up to four inches long and grey, brown or a mottled mixture of both colors. They prefer a high moisture environment, especially if sprinklers are run frequently. Drying out an area tends to reduce the population. To monitor for slugs, leave the hiding places or set a trap of a shallow dish of beer on ground. The slugs will be attracted to the yeasty brew, crawl in and usually die. Copper strips nailed in place around raised bed planters will repel slugs. Other barriers are diatomaceous earth and even salt poured in a ring around high valued plants. Salt will dry the slugs out, but too much can be toxic to the plant. There are chemical options of molluscicides, but most are toxic to animals therefore not recommended.

For questions on earwigs or slugs, or queries on other gardening topics, feel free to contact us, toll-free, at the UConn Home & Garden Education Center at (877) 486-6271, visit our website at www.ladybug.uconn.edu or contact your local Cooperative Extension center.

