

Controlling Earwigs

By John Ditchburn (Ditchy), Urban Food Garden <http://www.urbanfoodgarden.org/>

Earwig numbers in your vegetable garden tend to rise as the weather warms up. If their numbers get high enough they can do serious damage. Here are some suggestions on how to control them.

While Australia has some sixty species of native earwigs the variety that causes all the damage is the introduced European earwig (*Forficula auricularia*). In small numbers they are not a problem, in fact having some in your garden is good as they also prey on small insects such as aphids.

Monitoring earwig numbers

Earwigs are only a problem in large numbers so the first line of control is simply to monitor them. As they are nocturnal the best way to do this is to go out with a torch when the nights start to get warm and inspect the vegetables that are prone to damage by earwigs, these include bean, leek, onion and basil. A side benefit of these searches is you can also use the time to collect and kill any snails and slugs you find.



Earwigs feeding on a bean plant at night.

Hand killing earwigs

An earwig's main defence against predators is to drop off the leaf they are on if they detect any vibrations but if you are nimble enough they can be killed quite easily by simply picking them off the leaves and squashing them between your thumb and forefinger.

Earwig cover traps

As earwigs like to hide in damp crevices during the day one of the easiest ways to control them is to create a removable piece of cover and leave it in the vegetable

bed. Within a few days earwigs would have made it their home during the day, all you have to do is regularly empty the trap. There are a number of different types of cover traps.

POT COVER TRAPS

Take a small plastic or earthenware pot, stuff it with crumpled up newspaper and place it upside down in your vegetable bed.

ROLLED UP NEWSPAPER COVER TRAPS

Roll up several sheets of damp newspaper and tie string or elastic bands at each end to make sure it doesn't unravel.



Pot cover trap on the left and rolled up newspaper cover trap on the right.

CLOTH COVER TRAPS

Hessian bags or clothes made of natural cotton also make good cover traps. Simply roll the cloth up into a loose bundle and wet it to make it damp.

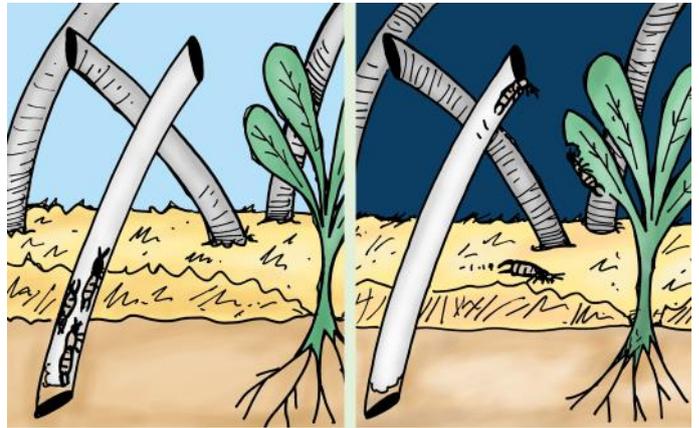
13 MILLIMETRE POLYPIPE STAKE TRAPS

These are mainly used to stop blackbirds from scratching up newly planted seeds and seedlings but they also act as earwig traps. Cut some 13 millimetre polypipe into 20 the 30 cm lengths and place them in the ground around your planted seedlings at irregular angles. Earwigs will hide in the hollow interior of the polypipe during the day, coming out at night to feed. To extract them all you

have to do is lift the stakes when the seedlings are big enough not to be damaged by blackbirds and tap the top ends into a bowl. The earwigs will literally fall out of the stakes.



13 millimetre polypipe stakes surrounding newly planted lettuce seedlings. The stakes are mainly there to stop blackbirds scratching them up but they also make excellent earwig traps.



Earwigs will hide inside the hollow of the interior of polypipe stakes during the day and emerge at night.

Disposing of the earwigs

The simplest way to kill earwigs is to tip them onto a path and stamp on them but if you have chickens a better solution is to feed them to the chickens, they will love you for it!

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