

## Home/Garden

# Earwigs: Nuisance value can exceed

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This is the time of year that earwigs may be more noticeable in your garden or home. Although earwigs are nocturnal insects, active at night in search for food, they may be disturbed during the day from their hiding places in laundry, cushions, baskets or storage areas.

An adult European earwig is reddish-brown and about 3/4-inch long. Like other insects, it has six legs, but its distinguishing characteristic is a pair of strong forceps on the rear

body segment. These pincers can be formidable in appearance, but earwigs will use them only in defense.

Earwigs breed and nest in the soil under damp piles of wood, old boards and stones. After the female lays a clutch of about 30 eggs, both the male and female will guard the nest, care for the eggs and feed the young until they are able to forage on their own. With the exception of the social insects, this behavior is relatively unusual in the insect world.

### A mixed blessing

Earwigs are scavengers. Their feeding habits vary, depending on what is available and on their developmental stage. Often earwigs deserve credit for their beneficial role in attacking other insect larvae, particularly fleas. They also eat soil organisms, fungi, algae, inactive stages of insects as they become available, as well as snails and other slow-moving invertebrates.

At other times they assume the role of pest by feeding on plants, especially young seedlings, ripe fruit,

and garbage. The immature earwigs, called nymphs, will often feed on green plant shoots and young leaves of many flowers and vegetables. Older earwigs will feed on blossoms and will often climb into fruit trees, especially peaches, to dine on ripening fruit. Corn ears may ripen with undeveloped kernels due to the damage caused by earwigs feeding on the silk.

The European earwig, the species commonly found in Massachusetts, lives primarily outdoors, but individuals often crawl into houses or are

## Wildflowers

### Visiting a Vermont specialty farm

I pulled off Route 7 in Charlotte, Vermont with some relief. The road radiated with blistering heat and the traffic was heavy — it was not a day to be racing around to tourist spots. However, tourists who pull into the gravel parking lot at the Vermont Wildflower Farm are apt to start relaxing as quickly as I did.

I bought my ticket and strolled around back to the sunny meadow just starting to bloom with the bold flowers of high summer — daisies, black eyed susans, goldenrod, coreopsis, wild mustard, and bird's foot trefoil. These blazing yellows and gold were accented by the blue of vetch, chicory and bachelor buttons.

A path led me into the woods that was damp and refreshingly cool, even on this scorching afternoon. There among the familiar bee balm, purple loosestrife, and spiderwort, I saw the beautiful Canada lily for the first time.

The Canada lily can be yellow or red and the pendant blossoms are about 3 or 4 inches across on a 2 to 5 foot stem. Their brilliant color and precise form are striking against the dim greenness of the woods.

After walking through the woods with all their riches, I came out to a little platform with benches and a chair, where I could sit and rest in the dappled shade and admire the swampy area planted with cattails and false dragon head (a plant that is also called obedient plant — when the flowers are pushed to either side they stay that way), and the frogs and red-winged blackbirds. When we create an environment that is hospitable to the wildflower, we'll entertain lots of other happy guests as well.

We are all familiar with many wildflowers though we don't often know their names. We tend to take them for granted and don't even see their beauty, until it is called to our

Pat  
Leuchtman

Between  
The Rows



attention. Ray Allen, a Florida native, moved North and was overwhelmed by the number of different wildflowers that live in Vermont. He has made it possible for visitors to his Wildflower Farm to identify common and unusual wildflowers, and to appreciate their loveliness, which is sometimes as dramatic as the red poppy, and often as subtle as the blue flax.

I appreciated the plantings of native trees, all of which are labeled. When we have an opportunity to plant a tree, we tend to put in the same old maples. As beautiful as they are, there are many other trees that are just as handsome and hardy, and that we tend to overlook because we are not familiar with them.

Allen now sells clean, weed-free, wildflower seeds and seed mixes, and offers some practical advice about planting and cultivating wildflowers.

Some people are attracted to the idea of wildflowers because they think they can just scatter the seed in their lawn or field, be done with mowing a grass lawn and enjoy a blooming meadow forever more. If you want to be successful, Allen says you need to put in a little more work than that. Especially at the start.

Wildflower seeds, even a meadow mix, need to be planted in soil that has been turned and cultivated. After the seeds have been planted, the area needs to be kept moist while the seeds germinate and become established. Depending on the variety this



can take between a week and a month or more. My aunt and uncle planted a seed mix in a long wide row at the edge of their vegetable garden. It was a gorgeous riot of pink, red and yellow poppies blooming amidst clouds of white wild baby's breath. They would not have had such luxurious bloom if they had scattered the seed in the uncultivated field.

Wildflowers are tough and hardy — if they are planted in the right spot. It's as important to put the right wildflower in the right place as

it is any other flower or shrub. When choosing wildflowers for your yard, examine your site and decide if it's dry and sunny, or damp and shady, and choose your seed accordingly.

Whether or not you go to the Vermont Wildflower Farm on Route 7 in Charlotte, just 12 miles south of Burlington (the gardens are open every day from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. from mid-May to mid-October), you can get a free catalog by writing P.O. Box 5, Route 7, Charlotte, VT 05445-0005. A packet of a single variety is \$1, and a one ounce packet of a seed mix that will cover 1000 square feet is \$6.95.