

School-to-Nature



Male & Female Earwigs



Earwig with Eggs and Babies



Head close-up of an Earwig

Earwig

The Earwig has been named “pincher bug” because of the parts at the end of their 1-inch-long bodies. In males, these appendages are curved, and in females they are straight. They do not pinch humans; the pincers are used to hunt prey, fend off attacks, and for mating rituals. The insect order name is Dermaptera, a Greek word combining derma, meaning skin, and ptera, meaning wings. They have two sets of wings; a harder pair for protection, and flexible inner wings that you can see in the photo to the right; but they seldom actually fly, using their wings instead to jump short distances.



Earwigs live about a year, mating just before going underground to survive the winter. Females lay their eggs where they hibernate; and the eggs hatch in the spring. The babies pass through metamorphosis from egg to nymph to adult, molting 5 times in the process.

This insect is nocturnal, active at night hunting and eating. If you see one during the day it is most likely because you have disturbed its hiding place. When people find them in homes, sometimes they worry about an infestation; but the Earwig is actually a solitary bug with no colony or queen. They cause no natural threat to people. They like cool, damp places for shelter and for hunting. They are the environmental janitors, feasting on decaying things: insects, plants, flowers, fruits. They are hunted by birds, lizards, frogs, centipedes, spiders, and yellowjacket wasps.

This unfortunately-named insect is called an Earwig because some ancient folk foretold that this insect would crawl into humans’ ears to lay their eggs. This has never been true. The Earwig is not a “pretty” bug but it has its place in the natural order of things.

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