

NORTHWOODS YARD & GARDEN

Weekly Column

July 29, 2024

Dealing With Earwings & Slugs

Frequent rainfall for this growing season has been favorable for yard and garden plantings. Besides mosquitoes, certain insects and insect relatives also thrive in years with abundant rainfall. The list includes earwings, slugs, and millipedes.

Many insects and insect relatives like humid and dark conditions. Unfortunately, ideal growing conditions for plants, such as soils rich in organic matter, organic mulches, and moisture are also ideal habitat for earwings, millipedes, and slugs. There is a fine line between reducing favorable habitat for these pests and lowering the growing conditions for plants.

These types of pests are most active at night, so plant damage may be observed but whatever caused it is not visible. Earwings are one of the few pests that eat marigolds, so if leaves of bedding plants such as these are being reduced to veins, chances are earwings are involved. Slugs commonly make holes in leaves, with hostas at the top of their preference list.

When plant damage is noted, careful investigation may reveal the culprit. Earwings are elongated insects with pincer-like projections on the back end.



Slugs look like snails without shells, are usually grayish or whitish, and commonly leave a slime trail. Millipedes, primarily scavengers on dead plant material, look like small multisegmented worms often are found in tight curled balls as they dry up on pavement.

For potted plants, carefully lift the container and see what critter may be underneath. In mulched areas, turn some mulch to see what may crawl out. Go out after dark with a flashlight and you may catch the culprit at work.

None of these insects or insect relatives are poisonous and do not bite or sting although earwigs can pinch if handled. They are typically scavengers but occasionally feed on live plants, especially earwigs and slugs. They also wander indoors and become a nuisance. All are more active during wet weather.

Leaving a zone of bare concrete or soil that can dry out around homes and buildings helps keep them out. Also reduce entry points around doors and windows by assuring windows and doors fit tightly and caulking cracks and crevices in these areas.

Pieces of hose or similar material may be put out to trap earwings and slugs at night, then emptied in the morning. Plants being damaged by earwings may be treated with an insecticide if damage is warranted. Likewise, commercial slug baits are available. Always read and follow all label directions when using pesticides to ensure products are safely used on the plant being damaged.

Interested in learning more about Horticulture in Iron County?
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