Controlling earwig populations for a healthier garden
By Emma Feuz & Jake Hadfield

As summer heats up across Utah, gardeners and growers may soon notice the telltale signs of earwig damage in their crops. While these pincher-equipped insects can be helpful in small numbers, they're also known to cause significant harm to plants and fruit.

Earwigs overwinter as adults and begin laying eggs in the spring. Earwigs guard their nests until the young hatch, typically around mid-April in Utah. As the nymphs grow and disperse, they begin feeding—and that's when the damage starts to show.

Though earwigs can benefit gardens by feeding on aphids, caterpillars, mites, and other pests, they also target tender plant material. They especially favor ripe fruit but will also chew on buds, leaves, and flowers, creating noticeable damage to a wide range of crops and ornamentals. USU Extension recommends several low-cost, do-it-yourself methods for controlling earwigs:

- **Paper Traps**: Roll up damp newspaper or cardboard and place it in garden beds or tie it to tree branches. Earwigs seek dark, moist places to hide during the day and will gather inside the rolls. These traps should be checked and replaced every few days.
- **Oil Traps**: Earwigs are drawn to strong-smelling oils. Poke holes in old yogurt or sour cream containers, then fill them with a mix of fish or bacon grease and place them in the garden to lure and trap the insects.
- **Sticky Traps**: Because earwigs are poor fliers, sticky traps—such as duct tape placed around plants or garden beds—can also be effective in reducing populations.

For more serious infestations, insecticides may be used. Several products are available, but users should always follow label directions carefully to ensure safe and effective application. By combining trapping methods with targeted chemical use if needed, gardeners can protect their plants and keep earwig populations in check. If you have any questions please reach out to the Juab County Extension Office at 435-623-3450.