

ANT FACT SHEET



DESCRIPTION AND HABITS:

Most ants found in and around homes nest outdoors and enter a home only to look for food. Different species of ants have various food habits. Some like sweet materials and others like seeds, grease, or protein-rich foods. Ants periodically produce mating swarms with large numbers of winged males and females that emerge from the colony and fly. While most ants cause only a nuisance problem by foraging for food inside a building or forming nests in unwanted areas, such as playgrounds or lawn areas, pharaoh ants and carpenter ants can nest indoors, and carpenter ants occasionally damage wood.

Ants are characterized by a narrow, pinched "waist", and bent or elbowed antennae. They can be confused with termites, particularly when swarms are produced. However, termites have a broad waist and antennae that look like a string of small beads.

Some of the more common ants found in and around buildings include:

Field ants



(*Formica* species); among the most common ants found in homes and around buildings. They are generally dark brown or black and medium-size (3 to 7 mm) and nest in loose soil found around rocks and foundations.

Cornfield ants



(*Lasius* species) make their nests in fields and around homes. Nesting sites can be brick or stone walls, cracks in the pavement, beneath rocks, and in openings around foundations. They do not nest in the house, but often forage inside in search of sweet materials. Cornfield ants generally are small (2 to 2.5 mm) and brown or black in color.

Carpenter ants



(*Camponotus* species) are the largest ants (6 to 10mm) and often are black, red or dark brown. Some eastern plains species are lighter in color.

Harvester ants

(*Pogonomyrmex* species) are fairly large (4 to 8 mm), and red or dark brown in color. Harvester ants clear the vegetation from the area around the nest and produce conspicuous mounds. They are seed feeders and rarely enter homes.

Pavement ants



(*Tetramorium caespitum*) commonly make their nests around foundations, under rocks and in cracks of sidewalks and driveways. They are small ants (2.5 to 4 mm) with a dark body, pale-colored legs and antennae, and have a series of grooves on their face. Pavement ants forage on a variety of food that includes grease, meat, small seeds and sweets.

Pharaoh ants



(*Monomorium pharoanis*) are one of the most persistent and difficult ants to control. They are small (1.5 to 2 mm) and yellow or pale reddish-brown. Unlike most other ants, pharaoh ants adapt well to nesting indoors. They spread their colonies throughout a building and readily split into smaller colonies when disturbed. Pharaoh ants like a wide range of food, which includes syrups, jellies, grease, cake, and pet foods. They are a serious pest in hospitals, dormitories and apartments.

Thief ants

(*Solenopsis molesta*) are small (1 to 1.5 mm) and sometimes confused with pharaoh ants. They nest indoors and outdoors and often live in the nest of larger ants. They forage and feed on a variety of foods that include grease, sweets and meats.

Imported Fire ants



(*Solenopsis invicta*) are an aggressive species. The workers are 1.6 to 5.8 mm long. Nests occur in loose soil and may be up to 60cm tall and 60cm wide and contain up to one-quarter million workers. They are a very aggressive species.

MEDICAL IMPORTANCE:

Most ants are harmless. However, some ants may either bite or sting. Field ants do not have a "stinger" but they can pinch thin areas of skin and secrete formic acid that produces a short-lived pain. (Note: formic acid can be neutralized by applying a thick paste of bicarbonate of soda (the common ingredient in baking soda) to the sting area. Harvester ants have a blunt stinger but can produce a painful sting - usually they can't penetrate thick areas of skin, such as a hand. Children generally are more likely to feel harvester ant stings than adults. Fire ants produce a very painful sting which causes fiery itching, pustules, and sometimes more severe reaction including anaphylactic shock.

MANAGEMENT AND CONTROL:

An important step to any ant control program is to remove attractive food. Crumbs, grease, food scraps and other food is sought by foraging worker ants and they will return to areas where food is found. If ant-feeding bait is used as a control, it's important to remove other food so the ants concentrate on the bait and not the food.

Most nuisance ants nest outdoors. Perimeter treatments with residual sprays applied around foundations can prevent many ants from foraging indoors. For more permanent control, destroy nests. Dusts usually are more effective on nests than sprays because dusts are more readily tracked into the colony. Slow-acting insecticides are most useful since they allow the forager to return the poison in the food to be fed around the colony, killing queens and young. (Note: all use and sales of ant baits that contain sodium arsenate have been banned since 1989.) Several brands of ant baits or ant traps are sold.

Control of Carpenter Ants

The ant nest must be found to effectively control carpenter ants. More and more success is being had using baits to control Carpenter ants. Newer bait formulations are making baits more palatable to these insects. Carpenter ants most often nest outside a building and enter only for food. Nests in buildings usually are found in high-moisture wood such as areas around plugged drain gutters, poorly fitted or damaged siding and flashing, wood shingle roofs, hollow porch posts and columns, and leaking doors and window frames. Wood in contact with soil, such as porches or stairs, also may provide nest areas. Piles of shredded wood or wood with clean tunnels (not containing mud or other debris that termites produce) are signs of carpenter ant nesting. Sometimes carpenter ant nests can be located by the distinct, dry rustling sound an active colony makes.

To control indoor carpenter ants:

1. eliminate high moisture conditions that provide wood conditions suitable for carpenter ant nesting
2. use baits in areas where carpenter ants are found foraging
3. apply insecticides to nest and nest areas.

Dusts are an effective way to treat nest galleries because they are tracked in by the legs and body of the ants. If nests are located, drilling allows a direct and effective way to apply insecticides. Spraying or dusting a suspected foraging area will not be as effective as treating the nest directly.

Control of Pharaoh Ants

Pharaoh ants are unusually well suited to nesting indoors and most colonies are located in buildings rather than outdoors. They also are poorly controlled with residual sprays since irritating chemicals (including many cleaners and other solvents) may irritate the ants and cause the nest to "bud" into separate colonies which disperse throughout the structure. Slow-acting baits are the most effective control for pharaoh ants. Sweet baits, particularly mint apple jelly, are readily accepted by foraging workers. However, pharaoh ants may later become saturated by the sweet baits and no longer accept them. Fat-based bait in combination with sweets (peanut butter and honey) is often effective for a longer period than just sweet baits. To improve bait acceptance remove other sources of food. Where other attractive foods remain, ants may not readily feed on the poisoned baits.

Since the purpose of baiting is to get the ants to feed on the bait and return it to the colony, do not use residual insecticides or volatile cleaners that repel pharaoh ants. Residual insecticides and cleaning solvents are preventive treatments and should be used in areas where ants are not present.