

PestPedia: Ants-General

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Ants are one of the most successful groups of insects. They are social insects that live in colonies which are usually located in the ground, but they may enter buildings for shelter and/or food. Ants feed on practically every kind of food, but those entering homes are looking for sweets and/or protein-containing substances. About 700 species of ants occur in the United States and Canada. Of these, only about 25 species commonly infest homes. The biology and habits of each ant species are different, so a detailed knowledge of these for each species is necessary for effective control.

- More than 20 varieties of ants invade homes throughout the United States during the warm months of the year. Worldwide, there are more than 12,000 species, but only a small number cause problems.
- Destructive ants include fire and carpenter ants. Others ant types include the honey, Pharaoh, house, Argentine, and the thief ant.
- All ants share one trait: They're unsightly and contaminate food.
- Ants range in color from red to black.
- Fire ants are vicious, unrelenting predators with a powerful, painful sting.
- At least 32 deaths in the U.S. can be attributed to severe allergic reactions to fire ant stings.
- Millions of dollars are spent each year eradicating fire ants alone.
- Carpenter ants range in size from one-quarter inch for a worker ant to up to three-quarters inch for a queen.
- A carpenter ant colony can have a long life span. Each colony is founded by a single fertilized queen that establishes a nesting site in a cavity in wood.
- A carpenter ant colony does not reach maturity until it contains 2,000 or more workers, which can take three to six years.

Pest Facts: Argentine Ants

Images



Description

Argentine ant colonies can grow to monumental size. Their colony borders sometimes cover entire habitats. Argentine ant queens also assist with foraging for food. The ant gives off a musty odor when crushed. Worker argentine ants are about one sixteenth of an inch long. Queen argentine ants are one eighth of an inch to one quarter of an inch long.

Pest Facts

Color

Dark brown to black; shiny	
	Legs
Six	
	Shape
Segmented; oval	
	Size
1/16-1/4 inches	
	Antennae
Yes	
	Flying
Rare winged swarmers	
	Region
AL, AR, CA, FL, GA, IL, LA, MD, MO, MS, NC, OR, SC, TN, WA	

Habits

Argentine ants deposit trails continuously, instead of just from nest to food source. This habit ensures they do not waste time visiting the same area for food. They prefer to eat sweets but they will eat almost anything including meats, eggs, oils and fats.

Habitat

Argentine ant colonies are located in wet environments near a food source.

Threats

Argentine ants do not pose a health threat, but they can contaminate food.

Prevention

Eliminate standing water. Pests, such as Argentine ants are attracted to moisture. Keep tree branches and other plants cut back from the house. Sometimes pests use these branches to get into your home. Make sure that there are no cracks or little openings around the bottom of your house. Sometimes pests use these to get into your home. Make sure that firewood and building materials are not stored next to your home. Pests like to build nests in stacks of wood.

Pest Facts: Carpenter Ants

Images



Description

Carpenter ants get their name because they excavate wood in order to build their nests. Their excavation results in smooth tunnels inside the wood (formicarium). Carpenter ants range in size from one-quarter inch for a worker ant to up to three-quarters inch for a queen.

Pest Facts

	Color
Varies depending on species, from red to black or a combination. The two most common species are black.	
	Legs
Six	
	Shape
Segmented; oval	
	Size
5/8 inches	
	Antennae
Yes	
	Flying
Winged swarmers	
	Region
Contiguous states	

- Size ranges from one-fourth inch for a worker ant to up to three-fourths inch for a queen in the most common species.
- May range from red to black in color.
- Build nests in deteriorating, moist wood; often the colony will extend its nest into adjacent, sound wood.
- Are commonly found in porch pillars and roofs, window sills, telephone poles, live and dead trees, rotting logs and stumps and wood in contact with soil.
- Do not actually eat the wood removed during nest-building activities; rather, deposit it outside entrances to the colony in small piles.

Habits

All species mainly attack wood that is or has been wet and damaged by mold. Even though these ants first invade wet, decayed wood, they may soon begin building paths through dry, undamaged wood. They usually come into buildings through cracks around doors, windows, or through holes for wires.

They will also crawl along overhead wires, shrubs, or tree limbs that touch the building far above the ground.

Habitat

Carpenter ants build their nests outdoors in various wood sources, including tree stumps, firewood or landscaping. They need a constant water source to survive. They will enter homes through wet, damaged wood.

Threats

Carpenter ants damage wood through their nest building. If they gain entry to a structure, they pose a property threat. They can convey a painful bite with pronounced mandibles and injection of formic acid into the wound.

Prevention

Because carpenter ants require a water source, eliminate sources of moisture or standing water. Keep tree branches and other plants cut back from the house. Sometimes pests use these branches to get into your home. Make sure that there are no cracks or little openings around the bottom of your house. Sometimes pests use these to get into your home. Make sure that firewood and building materials are not stored next to your home. Pests like to build nests in stacks of wood.

Pest Facts: Odorous House Ants

Images



Description

This ant gets its name from the strong, rotten coconut-like smell it gives off when crushed. These tiny insects range in size from one-sixteenth of an inch to one-eighth of an inch long.

Pest Facts

	Color
Brown or black	
	Legs
Six	
	Shape
Segmented; oval	

	Size
1/16-1/8 inches	
	Antennae
Yes	
	Flying
Winged swarmers	
	Region
All 50, AR, CA, KY, MS, NJ, OR, TN, VA, WA	

Habits

Odorous house ants like to eat sweets, especially melon.

Habitat

Typically living for several years, these ants make their homes in exposed soil and wall voids.

Threats

These ants do not pose a public health risk, but they can contaminate food and should be avoided.

Prevention

Eliminate standing water. Pests such as odorous house ants are attracted to moisture. Keep tree branches and other plants cut back from the house. Sometimes pests use these branches to get into your home. Make sure that there are no cracks or little openings around the bottom of your house. Sometimes pests use these to get into your home. Make sure that firewood and building materials are not stored next to your home. Pests like to build nests in stacks of wood.

Pest Facts: Pavement Ants

Images



Description

Pavement ants get their name because they make their nests in or under cracks in pavement. They can infest structures.

Pest Facts

	Color
Dark brown to blackish	
	Legs
Six	
	Shape
Segmented; oval	
	Size
1/8 inches	
	Antennae
Yes	
	Flying
Winged swarmers	
	Region
All 50	

Habits

These ants will eat almost anything, including insects, seeds, honeydew, honey, bread, meats, nuts and cheese.

Habitat

These ants live in or under pavement cracks.

Threats

These ants do not pose a public health risk, but they can contaminate food and should be avoided. They are not aggressive, but can bite and sting.

Prevention

Eliminate standing water. Pests, such as ants, are attracted to moisture. Keep tree branches and other plants cut back from the house. Sometimes pests use these branches to get into your home.* Make sure that there are no cracks or little openings around your house. Sometimes pests use these to get into your home. Make sure that firewood and building materials are not stored next to your home. Pests like to build nests in stacks of wood.

Pesky fire ants infiltrating state

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Pest Facts: Red Imported Fire Ants

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Description

Red imported fire ants nest in soil and build mound nests. They can infest garages.

Pest Facts

Dark reddish brown	Color
Six	Legs
Segmented; oval	Shape
1/8-3/8 inches	Size
Yes	Antennae
Winged swarmers	Flying
Southeastern U.S. from Virginia to Texas	Region

Habits

These ants will build large mound nests, and will sting humans who come across a nest.

Habitat

Red imported fire ants will build their nest mounds outdoors in landscape areas or near a structural foundation. The ant will gain entry to a building through holes or cracks.

Threats

The sting of a red imported fire ant is painful and often results in a raised welt that becomes a white pustule. Often, a person stung by a red imported fire ant receives multiple painful stings from more than one of the ants. Persons allergic to insect stings will react more severely.

Prevention

Red imported fire ants and their telltale mound nests should be actively avoided. To prevent entry into a structure, seal all internal and external cracks and crevices.

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Pesky fire ants infiltrating state
From June 9 Nashville Tennessean
By Leon Alligood / Staff Writer

Fire ants, the insect scourge of the deep South, want to annex Tennessee. The front wave of the prolific, mound-building, hot-stinging insects is now within 75 miles of Nashville, according to the state Department of Agriculture.

"We added the rest of Lewis County, all of Lincoln and a little slice of Maury County" to the state's fire ant map, said Gray Haun, the department's plant certification administrator.

Spot infestations have been treated as near to Nashville as the Cool Springs area.

Tennessee has issued a quarantine notice for all or parts of 29 counties from Memphis to Chattanooga.

The quarantine prohibits movement of hay, straw, grass sod or nursery stock from affected areas to unaffected areas without an inspection and permit from the Tennessee Department of Agriculture.

State officials hope this will stall the spread of fire ants, which have been slowly spreading north and east for the past 80 years.

Fire ants are adept hitchhikers, using various strategies to find their way to new areas. They'll even latch on to soil clumped on the wheels or tracks of earth moving machines.

"They are making progress. The spot infestations we can handle, but the front, well, you just watch them walk over you," Haun said.

Frank Yancey, farm agent with Lewis County Agricultural Extension Service, knows what Haun means.

When Yancey moved to Hohenwald, the county seat, 18 months ago, fire ants were found only near the Lewis-Lawrence county lines.

"Now we've got them over all the county," he said.

Yancey said the majority of his calls have been from homeowners.

"They are worried about them because of small children and pets and the ugliness of the mounds because they build up to a foot high in the yard. The farmers who call want to know if fire ants could kill a calf, but that would be uncommon. Farmers are also worried about the restrictions from the quarantine," he said.

"The main question everybody wants to know is how to get rid of them." Unfortunately, there's no easy solution. Several commercial brands of fire ant poisons are available, Yancey said.

"I'd just recommend to everyone that they read the directions and apply it like you're supposed to," Yancey said.

Meanwhile, researchers at the University of Tennessee Experiment Stations hope to have success introducing two biological controls for fire ants.

"One is a protozoan disease that is taken into the colony. It doesn't get them all, but it decreases its size," Roberto Pereira said.

Another is the decapitating fly, a tiny South American insect whose larvae develops in the head of the fire ant. Eventually, the ant's head falls off.

"We are preparing to introduce the fly in Bradley County and at the Ames Plantation Experiment Station near Memphis. We were unsuccessful last year, but perhaps we will be successful this time," Pereira said.

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