

Information Biology and Control of Common Household Ants



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What is the number one pest homeowners face each year? Cockroaches? Spiders? Mice?

No it is our little friends the ants. These social insects are the most successful group of pests and invade more homes yearly than any other species of pest. Whether it is the pavement ant, odorous house ant, citronella ant, pharaoh ant or the infamous wood destroying, carpenter ant, all homeowners will eventually encounter this group of insects.

What makes ants so successful? It is the social nature of these insects that allow it to survive and thrive in all countries around the globe. There are more than 12,000 species of ants all over the world. Ant colonies can consist of millions of ants depending on the species of ants.

There are three kinds of ants in a colony: The queen reproductive's, the sterile female workers and the male reproductive drones. The reproductive ants have wings during their swarming / mating stage of their insect lifecycle. The wings are necessary to disperse the new queens when forming new colonies away from the parent colony. **[It is this winged stage of ants that often gets confused with swarming termites.](#)**



Figure 1 Ant Left Termite right - Ants have a narrow waist and elbowed antennae. Termites have a straight body and straight antennae.

The queens are the only ants that can lay eggs. Once the queen grows to adulthood, she spends the rest of her life laying eggs. An ant colony may have one queen or many queens depending on the species.

After the eggs hatch, the new ants become the worker ants for the colony. Some of jobs of the colony include taking care of the eggs, larvae, pupa, gathering food for the colony. They also maintain the extensive tunnels and ant mounds. Interesting enough, most worker ants that collect food for colony cannot chew and digest the food on their own. They must carry it back to the colony where it is fed to the hungry

pupae. After the pupae processes the food they then feed it back to the worker ants. This process of transferring food between colony members is called *trophalaxis*.

How can we [get rid of ants](#) using the ant's own biology and behaviors?

#1- Ants communicate and cooperate by using pheromones chemicals that can alert others to danger or lead them to food sources. You can place a small amount of food such as corn meal or bread crumbs in an ant trail and observe where the ants bring the food. They will most always head to the nest or at least to where they enter the structure.

#2- Now that you have located the nest or entry point you can direct your control measures at the optimum placement or treatment point. Ant baits would be a good environmentally responsible choice for these situations. Ant baits can be extremely effective knowing that ants will collect and share these baits with other members of the colony.

#3- Ants typically feed on honeydew secreted by aphids, seeds, fungus, or even other insects. Today there are many ant baits that mimic the food sources in the ant's natural diet thus making it more palatable and effective. Many ant baits contain boric acid which is a naturally occurring compound that is used in the manufacturing of eyewash products and cleaning compounds. Ants can be picky eaters at certain times a year so to get better acceptance you may need to rotate bait matrixes that contain different ingredients as: starch, sugars and proteins.

#4- Many species of ants are nocturnal and it is best to observe them at night especially if you are having a tough time locating the nests. Carpenter ants in particular are most active at night and may have more than one nest. Many times there is a parent colony and several smaller satellite colonies. Be sure to identify and treat all the locations with enough bait to eliminate the colony.

#5- There are times when ant baiting is just not enough to [eliminate an ant infestation](#). Luckily today we have a choice of effective, eco-friendly or natural botanical pesticides. Some examples of pest control products based on natural plant sources are; Rosemary, Thyme, Peppermint and Wintergreen oils. Other examples of botanical pesticides include products based on Hexa-Hydroxyl oil, derived from tree oils and pyrethrum oils extracted from the chrysanthemum flower.

As you can see there are many pest control choices available today that do not have to make an adverse impact on the environment without sacrificing our comfort and sanitation levels inside our homes.

For more information on [ant pest control](#) please email us on our website.

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