



CARPENTER ANT

PREVENTION & CONTROL

MEET THE PEST

Carpenter ants are one of the most common structural pests found in and around the home. The largest of the house invading ants, the carpenter ant ranges from 1/4 to 3/4 inches (3/5-2 cm) long, has a constricted waist, bent antennae and is black, reddish-black or brownish black in color. Carpenter ants tunnel and make nests in damaged and rotted wood and are attracted to wood which has been exposed to moisture.

Trees, cut logs and any areas of wood construction (e.g., porch, deck, window sill, door, etc.) which become moist are vulnerable to carpenter ant attack. This is particularly true of rotting sections of wood.

When carpenter ants invade wood, the worker ant finds an entry route by gnawing a clean tunnel parallel to the grain, wherever a crack or crevice exists. The wood is chewed and discarded outside the tunnel. The discarded shavings, which resemble sawdust, provide an indication of carpenter ant nesting areas. Over time the nest may be extended into sound wood, especially in the case of softwood lumber.

Carpenter ants must leave their wooden tunnels to search for food. Popular food sources consist of aphid honeydew, other insects (living or dead), plant juices, and food (fats, sugar and other sweets) found in the home.

LIFE CYCLE

The carpenter ants which are commonly seen in and near dwellings are the wingless, non-reproducing adults of the worker caste. Carpenter ants live in large groups or colonies consisting of hundreds of worker ants, a few

reproductive males and females as well as at least one queen. Between April and June winged males and female ants develop and swarm out of the nest in mating flights. Shortly after, the male dies and the single fertilized queen finds a suitable nesting place to lay eggs and begin a new colony. The small, white, oval eggs hatch into larvae. The larvae are tended until they pupate and adult ants emerge. If warm temperatures exist, the egg to adult cycle can be completed in three months. At first the colony is small, however, in later years the population can increase to 2000-3000 ants.



MONITORING

The presence of carpenter ants inside a home always warrants investigation. In general, ants found inside the home during the winter are a good indicator that a nest is located somewhere in the structure. The key to carpenter ant control is locating the nest(s) and preventing access to food supplies. Monitoring is most effective at night as this is when the ants are most active, leaving the nest to search for food. Carpenter ants tend to use a definite trail and they can be followed as they return to the nest after searching for food. Small sawdust piles near wooden structures (e.g., windows, doors steps etc.) can also indicate the entrance to a carpenter ant nest.

CONTROL

Physical

It may not be necessary to remove the nests of ants that are nesting in nearby wooded areas and only entering the house in search of food. Carpenter ant control may be achieved by the following: reduce or prevent excess moisture in wood; remove possible food sources; avoid storing wood inside or close to the house for long periods of time; remove any decaying wood found around the

home and practice good sanitation measures. Remove attractive food sources; store food and garbage in sealed containers to decrease attractions for carpenter ants; caulk openings or install barriers on areas which could act as entrances for ants; and provide good ventilation inside the home.

If a nesting site is found in or adjacent to the home, determine the extent of the damage. If structural damage has occurred, it may be necessary to remove the damaged section and the section containing the nest. Use a high suction vacuum to remove the ants, eggs and nesting materials from the surrounding areas and/or wall voids.

If damage is minor or removal of the wood is not possible, a high suction vacuum alone can be used to remove the ants. This should greatly reduce the colony, however, it may not totally eliminate the problem. Be sure to destroy the vacuum bag containing the captured ants by burning it. If this is not practical, discard it in a tightly sealed garbage bag.

Chemical

If physical control measures are not effective, use a pesticide which will have a minimal impact on both you and the environment. Boric acid powder has a low toxicity to humans but acts as a stomach poison for ants. Diatomaceous earth is an insecticidal dust which acts as an abrasive. It cuts the outer layer of the ant's body causing it to dehydrate and then die. When blown or puffed into dry wall voids, cracks and crevices either of these products can provide long lasting control of ants. Dust formulations may be superior to sprays in controlling ants because they can be directly forced into the tunnels.

If the above measures are not effective, consult with an expert at a garden center for additional pesticides available. In the case of severe infestations, it may be necessary to seek professional help from a provincially certified pesticide applicator to achieve carpenter ant control.

Always use a registered domestic class pest control product labelled for carpenter ant control and carefully follow the label directions.

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