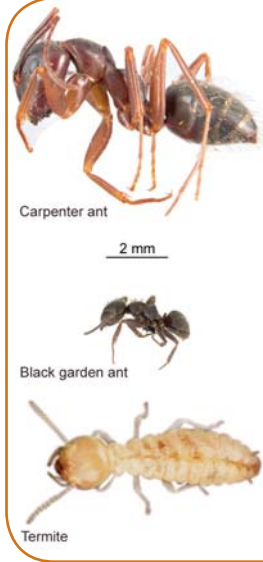




Ants

Pest Note



Photos: Pest and Diseases Image Library, Bugwood.org; April Nobile, antweb.org; Scott Bauer, USDA Agricultural Research Service, Bugwood.org



Remove access to food.
Photo: TC Lin, poagao.org

Ants—what are they?

Ants may be black, brown, red or yellow. Adult ants range in size from as small as 1 millimetre (1/16 to 1/32 inch, e.g. little black ants and thief ants) to as large as 13 millimetres (1/2 inch) (e.g. carpenter ants).

Ants create new colonies by a process of swarming or budding. The appearance of winged queens and smaller winged males means that swarming is taking place. The ants may come indoors at this time, but this does not necessarily mean that the ants will succeed in colonizing in your home.

Depending on the species, a colony is made up of one or more queen and worker ants. The queens lay the eggs while the workers defend the nest, care for larvae (hatched eggs) and forage for food. The workers carry food back to the nest to feed the queen, larvae and pupae (developing young ants).

Carpenter ants are larger than other species although the sizes of the workers vary. They can cause structural damage to homes as they destroy wood to make room for their nests. Piles of sawdust may indicate you have carpenter ants (for further information please refer to Health Canada’s Pest Note on Carpenter Ants).

Carpenter ants are sometimes confused with termites, but it is easy to distinguish between them: the termite has straight antennae and a thick waist, and the carpenter ant has a very narrow waist and “elbowed” antennae. Termites are present only in specific areas in Canada.

What can they do?

The species of ants commonly found in Canada are not aggressive, although some can sting. Ants should be tolerated as much as possible as they cause little damage in the garden. They can even be considered beneficial because they eat other insects such as young silverfish and moths.

Species that are known to invade homes in Canada may include the carpenter ant, the little black ant, the odorous house ant, the thief ant and the pharaoh ant. Pavement ants can become a nuisance in lawns, gardens and pathways as well as indoors.

How can I manage them?

Ant colonies send out scouts to forage for food. A successful scout leaves a scented trail for other workers to follow back to the food source. Removing access to food and water is the easiest way to avoid all pest problems. Ants are attracted to many types of food. They enjoy eating sugary and greasy foods like peanut butter or crumbs and are also attracted to the “honeydew” produced by aphids on infested houseplants.

- Store ant-attractive foods in glass jars with rubber gaskets or in plastic containers with lids that snap tight.
- Keep kitchen countertops clean. Sweep or vacuum the floor frequently, especially around pet dishes.
- Rinse containers before disposing of them in the garbage or in recycling bins.
- Empty kitchen garbage containers frequently.

Responsible Pesticide Use

Before Purchasing a Pesticide

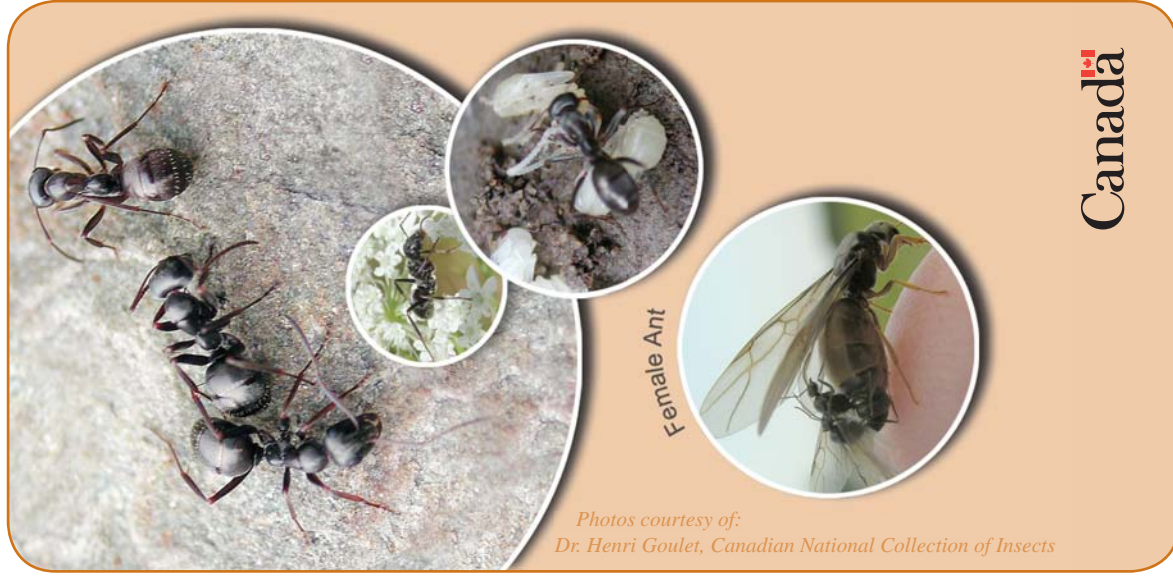
- Identify the pest correctly.
- Use physical control methods and alternatives to pesticides.
- Read the label directions and safety precautions before buying the product. The label must include the name of the pest to be controlled and the treatment location (e.g. indoor, outdoor, garden uses, pet treatment).
- Purchase only the quantity of product needed for the treatment.
- Consider hiring a licensed pest control operator.

Using a Pesticide

- Carefully read all label instructions and precautions before using pesticides.
- Do not drink, eat or smoke while applying pesticides.
- Persons and pets should vacate the area during treatment. Cover or remove aquaria.
- If kitchen area is to be treated, cover or remove food, dishes and utensils.

After Using a Pesticide

- Always wash your hands thoroughly after handling any pesticide product.
- Do not permit persons or pets to contact treated surfaces until residue has dried completely.
- Provide adequate ventilation of treated areas after use.



Photos courtesy of:
Dr. Henri Goulet, Canadian National Collection of Insects





Caulk along baseboards, cracks and crevices to exclude ants.



Diatomaceous earth is non-toxic to humans and pets.



Read the label carefully before using any pest control product.

- Place composters at a reasonable distance from the house.
- Repair and seal as many visible cracks in the foundation and exterior walls of your house as possible.
- Indoors, caulk along baseboards, cracks and crevices to keep the ants from passing through your house—if necessary, use duct tape or petroleum jelly to temporarily seal cracks.
- Ants will not cross sticky barriers—try placing two-sided tape around the legs of plant stands.
- Place pet dishes in a shallow dish of water. Ants can't swim, so they won't be able to get at your pet's food.
- Flood ant nests repeatedly with a garden hose to encourage the ants to move farther away from the house.
- Pour boiling water and detergent down the nest to temporarily reduce the population of a colony.

Products

Foraging ants gather food and bring it back to the nest to feed ant colony members. A bait system therefore, must work slowly enough to allow the poison to be fed to all members of the nest. This is a highly effective way of eliminating nests.

Diatomaceous earth can be placed in the cracks and crevices as a non-chemical means of control. This powder is composed of microscopic fossils that scratch the outer 'skin' of ants causing the ants to dehydrate and die. Natural gum resins can be applied around the base of trees and vines.

Baits containing boric acid are generally of low toxicity to other animals.

- Place bait stations directly in the path of foraging ants, but out of the reach of children and pets. Ant trails are commonly found along baseboards, the carpet edge along walls or along the edges and inside corners of cabinets.
- Use plenty of bait stations. Two different baits at the same time will give better results.
- Keep baits available for at least two weeks, repeated bait applications may be needed.
- Do not use chemical sprays to kill ants while using a bait system or the bait system will not work. Reapply the bait if needed.

Numerous domestic class chemical products are available to control ants. These products may contain chemicals such as pyrethrins, pyrethroids, methoprene, propoxur, carbaryl and others. Always check the label to make sure the product is intended for indoor use on ants.

Chemicals, sprays and dusts can be used effectively as barrier and nest treatments. Applying a chemical directly on the nest may eliminate colonies. Anthills indicate where the colony has built a nest, so look for anthills in your yard or follow the ant trails back to the nest. Nests located indoors in wall voids can be treated with dusts that can be puffed into the area.

Chemical barrier treatments can be applied to baseboards or door and window-frames to prevent outdoor nesting species from foraging for food indoors. Spraying indoors where trails have been observed may cut off food and water sources for an indoor nest and encourage the colony to bud. If the treatment seems to increase the number of ants, have the ant species identified or try using a bait system to control them.



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Photo: Dr. Henri Goulet, Canadian National Collection of Insects

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- Wipe clean all surfaces that come in direct contact with food, such as counters, tables and stovetops, including indoor and outdoor surfaces.
- Always store pesticides out of reach of children and pets and away from food and beverages.

Accidental Poisoning

- Call a poison control centre immediately and seek medical attention.
- Take the pesticide container or label with you to the emergency facility or physician.
- Follow first aid statements on the label.
- In case of accidental poisoning of pets seek veterinary attention immediately.
- Report pesticide incidents to manufacturers (phone number on label). They are required to send them to Health Canada.

Disposing of Pesticides

- Do not reuse empty pesticide containers. Wrap and dispose of in household garbage.
- Follow the product label instructions or contact provincial authorities for disposal of pesticides.

Note: These are general recommendations. Consult the label for specific instructions. When in doubt, contact a professional.

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