

MESSENGER-INQUIRER



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Managing Indoor Ants

Pesky and annoying -this describes the ants that are foraging for food, water, and shelter inside homes. The management method for the ants depends on the specific species of ant. Dozens of different species may be found in and around the home. In our area, the most common household-invading ants include pavement ants, carpenter ants, acrobat ants, and odorous house ants.

Resist the urge to spray the ants crawling around. Use them as part of the management strategy. The ants seen foraging over exposed surfaces are only a small part of the colony. Typically, thousands of additional ants, including one or more egg-laying queen, are hidden somewhere in a nest. The key to effective ant control is to eliminate the queens and other colony members within the nests.

Ants build their nests in many different locations, both inside and outside buildings. Species nesting inside, or foraging indoors for food or moisture, tend to be the most challenging to control.

The preferred nesting sites for ants include spaces behind walls, cabinets, appliances, window and door frames, and beneath floors and concrete slabs. These hidden areas make it

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difficult to determine their precise location. When the nest's location cannot be determined or is inaccessible, insecticide baits are the preferred solution. The advantage of using bait is that foraging ants take the insecticide back to the nest and feed it to the queen or queens and other members of the colony. As a result, the colony can be destroyed.

When using baits, watch for the ants and find the ant "trails", which are invisible odor trails worker ants follow between food and the nest, and place the bait next to the trails. Do not spray other insecticides or cleaning agents around the baited locations as this keeps ants from eating the bait. Initially, the number of ants around the bait station will increase. This indicates that the ants are feeding on the bait and transporting it back to the nest. Ant activity will hopefully subside in a few days as the number of ants in the colony declines. Continue to place other baits wherever ants are seen.

Ants are rather finicky in their food preferences and may alter them throughout the year. If one bait isn't attractive, try another. Optimal results usually require a sustained period of feeding, not just a brief visitation by a few ants. Retail baits usually will not control carpenter ants.

Consumer brands of insecticide in bait form include Combat, Raid, Ortho, and Terro. Professional ant baits sold online are Maxforce FC, Maxforce Quantum, Advion, Optigard, or Alpine.

The odorous house ant has become the most common and difficult to control. This ant is small, darkish in color, and forms distinct trails along surfaces.

The odorous house ant is often mistaken for the pavement ant, which can easily be

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controlled with most baits. The most accurate diagnostic difference is the absence of a noticeable "bump" or node along the constricted area between the thorax and abdomen.

Pavement ants have two obvious nodes and fine grooves or striations along the head and thorax.

A good quality hand lens, or ideally a microscope, is needed to see these characteristics.

In addition, pavement ants displace bits of soil from their typical nesting location under driveways, garage/patio slabs, or paved areas. Odorous house ants, in turn, give off a rotten coconut or pine-like scent when crushed.

Odorous house ants nest in many different locations outdoors and indoors. These ants commonly nest outdoors under pavement, mulch, woodpiles, flowerpots, and siding while foraging indoors for food and moisture. Nests may also occur within wall cavities, appliances, or in areas near sources of moisture. Odorous house ant nests tend to be mobile. The colonies relocate fast, often in response to changes in weather, disturbance, and other factors. Colonies usually have multiple egg-laying queens and may split into smaller colonies. Ants foraging indoors feed on all manner of foods, ranging from the trash can to the cereal bowl, but generally prefer sweets.

This particular ant is very difficult to control, especially by homeowners. The better baits to try are often sweet ones. Activity indoors can sometimes be alleviated by eliminating ready food sources such as spillage, pet food dishes, and keeping the sink clean and dry. Seal entry points into the home such as around door thresholds and windows, in addition to utility pipes and wires entering from outside. Trim back shrubs if branches are touching the home, since the branches serve as bridges to the building. In nature, this ant feeds extensively on plant

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nectar and honeydew excreted by plant-sucking insects such as aphids.

Help is often required to know which ant or ants you have. Ants placed in a container with white vinegar can be brought to your local Cooperative Extension Office for identification, free of charge through the University of Kentucky's Entomology Department.

For more information, contact the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Service at 270-685-8480 or annette.heisdorffer@uky.edu. The publication "Ant Control for Homeowners" (<http://entomology.ca.uky.edu/ef619>) contains information about baits and other management options.

Annette's Tips:

Identifying ants is the first step in management. When trying to control odorous house ants, you may need to call a professional. You may also need assistance when dealing with carpenter ants, as it may be more challenging to find an active nest. A publication about carpenter ants is available at the website <https://entomology.ca.uky.edu/ef603>.

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