

THEY'RE HERE....

CARPENTER ANT MANAGEMENT

Points of Entry for Carpenter Ants

- Clogged drains and gutters
- Fencing next to home
- Wiring entrances
- Edges of fireplace brick
- Window casings
- Door frames
- Vines and plants touching home
- Edges of siding
- Mulch around home
- Crawl space vent
- Plumbing
- Wood in contact with soil

Where You'll Find Carpenter Ants

Carpenter ants love damp climates and moist areas – damp wood, any dark void, a few morsels of food. Places that get a lot of rain are especially susceptible. So are homes built in heavily wooded areas or in low, shady places where the ground stays damp. In your home, you're likely to find carpenter ants nesting around a sink in the kitchen or bathroom. Maybe even around plumbing leaks, clogged gutters and downspouts.

A clean house is no guarantee. When carpenter ants move in, the first thing they do is look for food. Unlike termites, carpenter ants do not eat wood. They search for syrup, honey, jelly, meat, fruit, grease, fat, and other domestic foods. If these favorites are not available in your home, the ants will feed on dead or living insects or any other type of organic matter.

To construct their galleries, carpenter ants tear bits of wood and place them outside the nest. These sawdust-looking piles, called frass, may be the first visible sign that carpenter ants are present. Left unchecked for a period of time, these galleries can become quite large. While the primary nest is found in damp wood, carpenter ants establish many satellite colonies. This makes them difficult to control, especially since colonies may be found in any dark void- hollow curtain rods, hollow-core doors, ceilings, dead wall space, etc.

Carpenter ants mature in about two months and immediately start enlarging the nest. First year broods are small, with only 10 to 20 workers. But in a few years, when the colony has thousands of workers, small tunnels become major expressways connecting many hidden galleries. You may not be aware that a strong colony is firmly entrenched in your home until it is too late.

Telltale Signs of Carpenter Ants

- Trails of workers around the kitchen, pantry, and other areas where food is stored

- Sawdust-like material that workers kick out of their nests during excavation
- Listen for ant sounds in the quiet of the night. When the ants are chewing, or simply moving around in the nest, they make a sound like rustling cellophane.

If you see or hear any of these signs, you may have carpenter ants.

Carpenter Ants During Spring

It is common to find carpenter ants in homes during spring. It is important to try to determine whether the ants are coming from an outdoor or an indoor nest, although this can be difficult. Their presence is not sufficient evidence to conclude that there is a nest in your home. You may be able to make a more accurate determination based on when you first see carpenter ants. **If you find carpenter ants in your home during late winter or early spring, that suggests the ants are coming from a nest in the building.** However, if you see activity later in the year, it is less clear if the nest is in the building.

You may also see carpenter ant swarms (i.e. the reproductive queens and males, figures 1 and 4) during spring. Carpenter ants produce large numbers of queens and males during late summer. They emerge from nests the following spring for their nuptial flights. After mating, queens search for suitable sites to begin new nests. Once they land, their wings break off and each queen attempts to construct a new nest.

When carpenter ant nests are indoors, mating swarms become trapped inside. Finding large numbers of winged ants indoors is a sure sign that an indoor nest exists and may give the approximate location of the colony.

Finding one to several winged queens (figure 4) does not automatically mean a nest is present indoors. It is more likely the queens have just mated and have entered the home, searching for nesting sites. Wingless queens (figure 1) found walking indoors are new queens that have recently shed their wings but are still searching for nesting sites. They are not an indication of an indoor nest.

Prevention

An important method for preventing carpenter ant problems indoors is to eliminate high moisture conditions that are attractive to them. Also, replace any moisture-damaged wood. Be careful that wood or lumber that is stored in a garage or near the house is kept dry and, if possible, elevated to allow air circulation.

Store firewood as far away from buildings as possible. Remove tree and shrub stumps and roots. Trim branches that overhang the home. Note: Be sure the tree or shrub species can be pruned at the time you wish; e.g., do not prune oak between April 15 and September 15 because of the risk of oak wilt. Also, prune branches that touch electrical lines or other wires that are connected to the house; carpenter ants can travel from branches to lines and use them like a highway to buildings.

Detection

In order to eliminate carpenter ants nesting indoors, you need to locate and destroy their nest.

The nest may be located by careful and patient observations of worker ants, especially between sunset and midnight during spring and summer months when carpenter ants are most active. To follow carpenter ants without startling them, use a flashlight with a red film over the lens—ants cannot see red light. You can increase your chances of following workers to their nest by setting out food that is attractive to carpenter ants. Place food in areas where you find workers.

Many foods are attractive to carpenter ants, including honey or other sweet foods. During spring, carpenter ants are particularly attracted to protein sources, such as tuna packed in water. (Carpenter ants are not attracted to tuna packed in oil.) Set out small pieces of tuna for the ants to take back to their nest. It is easier to follow the ants when they are carrying food. With patience and perseverance, you can follow the ants back to their nest.

Other signs that indicate an active nest is nearby include small piles of coarse sawdust or wood shavings, consistent indoor sightings of large numbers of worker ants, i.e. 20 or more, and large numbers of winged ants indoors. Carpenter ants typically swarm from late winter through spring.

Also pay attention to areas where steady moisture is or has been a problem; firewood stored in an attached garage, next to the foundation, along an outside wall, or in a basement; areas around the plumbing or vent entrances; and trees with branches overhanging the house. These are possible sources of carpenter ant nests.

Sound detection may be helpful in locating a nest. An active colony may make a dry, rustling sound that becomes louder if the colony is disturbed. This sound, thought to be a form of communication, is made with the mandibles (jaws) and is not related to wood chewing. When trying to detect carpenter ants, tap the suspected area and then press an ear to the surface in order to hear any sound.

If one nest is found, watch for evidence of additional nests. More than one nest may be present in a structure.

Control

The best method to control carpenter ants is to locate and destroy the nest, replace damaged or decayed wood, and, if they exist, eliminate moisture problems. Eliminating a carpenter ant nest is a difficult and challenging task. It is possible for a home dweller to control carpenter ants on their own. However, in most cases, control should be performed by an experienced pest control applicator. They have the experience and a wider array of products to more effectively control a carpenter ant problem. Home dwellers can still play a crucial role in control programs by providing information to a pest control provider, such as when, where, and how many ants were seen.

Indoors

Nests are often concealed in wall voids, ceilings, subfloors, attics, or hollow doors. It is usually necessary for a professional pest control applicator to drill small (about 1/8 inch) holes and apply an insecticidal dust into the nest area. It is best to determine the nest's location as specifically as possible. Control should not be applied randomly through the home. There are no insecticides available to the public that are labeled for this type of application.

If it is difficult to locate the nest, an insecticidal dust can be applied into wall voids through electrical outlets. Carpenter ants commonly travel along electrical wiring and are likely to encounter the insecticides. This method works more slowly than a direct treatment into the nest. Boric acid is available to home dwellers to treat wall voids through electrical outlets. CAUTION: Use extreme care around electrical wiring and take all necessary steps to avoid accidental electric shocks.

If the nest is exposed (e.g. due to remodeling or reroofing) you can use a liquid or aerosol ready-to-use insecticide, such as bifenthrin, cyfluthrin, deltamethrin, or permethrin. Spray the insecticide directly into as much of the nest as possible. The more of the colony that is exposed, the better your chance of destroying it. It is necessary to anticipate a carpenter ant colony and have a product ready at the start of construction. Once the nest is exposed, that portion of the colony will try to relocate to protect themselves.

Sprays on surfaces where ants travel or congregate, such as along baseboards or in holes or cracks in the walls and floors, may reduce the frequency and number of ants you see. However, they are not effective in eliminating a nest because 1) the ants carry very little insecticide back to their nests and 2) most ants forage outside and do not come in contact with the insecticides.

Be aware of the potential for more than one nest in a building, but only treat nests that you know exist. Do not treat areas of a building if additional nests are not found. Once a carpenter ant nest is treated, continue to watch for evidence of an active nest until the following spring. If no evidence is observed, then further insecticide applications are unnecessary.

Baits

If the nest cannot be located, baits may be an effective alternative. Baits work by combining an attractive food source with a slow-acting toxicant. A delayed toxicant is critical because it allows the ants to forage normally for days or even weeks. During that time, ants consume the bait and return to the nest to share the bait with the rest of the colony. In a process known as trophallaxis, one ant regurgitates its stomach contents to another ant. This food sharing behavior enables the bait to be spread throughout the colony before the toxicant takes effect.

There are a few baits available to nonprofessionals for carpenter ant control. Most retail products are liquid or granular formulations containing hydramethylnon, sulfluramid, abamectin, or boric acid. An inexpensive liquid bait of 1% boric acid in a 10% sugar water solution can be mixed at home, but it is very slow acting and must be constantly replenished. Baits vary a great deal in their effectiveness. Carpenter ants have complex food preferences, and some of the sugar-based baits will not be attractive to the ants long enough to be successful.

The keys to successful baiting are placement and monitoring; a bait cannot be effective if it is never encountered by ants. Place the bait only in areas where activity has been seen or is strongly suspected. After offering the bait, monitor it over 24 hours for feeding activity. Any bait that is ignored should be substituted with another, and any that is consumed should be replenished. Remember that increased ant activity around baits is a good sign. Never apply insecticides on or around baits because this will prevent feeding and render baits useless. Do not spray or dust other areas of the home, especially where carpenter ants are seen, as this can reduce the effectiveness of the bait. Be patient—baits can take weeks or months to achieve control.

Professional pest control personnel are trained in baiting techniques and have access to a wider variety of products than consumers. They are more likely to achieve positive results. Contact a licensed pest control company if you prefer the expertise and experience of a professional.