TYPES OF ANTS

Nearly everyone has had problems with ants. You may find a trail of tiny ants on the kitchen floor or cabinet. Mounds of biting, stinging fire ants may appear in your yard. You may see large ants in or around your home.

This brochure will help you keep ants away from your house in a safe way.

In the southern U.S., the tiny ants that people see in their homes most of the time are Argentine ants. Some people call them sugar ants because they are attracted to sweet foods. Argentine ants will nearly always make a trail from their nest to the food. You may be able to follow the trail back to the nest, but you may not be able to follow the trail out of the kitchen. Argentine ants usually nest outside, but they may also nest in wall voids. Although Argentine ants may come inside searching for food or water anytime of the year, they usually come inside during the fall as temperatures drop and their regular foods are harder to find.

Large mounds in the yard are usually fire ants. Fire ants rush out of the nest in large numbers when they are disturbed, and they sting any person or animal nearby. Fire ants have a painful sting, and they can be dangerous. Additionally, they spoil the yard for outdoor fun. Fire ants may also come inside during dry periods or searching for food.

If you are renting a house or apartment, notify the landlord if you have ant problems. Controlling ants often requires the use of pesticides, and you may need to treat large areas.

The following 4 steps will help you control ants in your home:

1. Call your Local Cooperative Extension Service office.
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   - Karen Vail - University of Tennessee
   - George Hamilton - Rutgers University
   - Brian Forschler - University of Georgia

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Gale A. Buchanan, Dean and Director

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Ant problems may cover a large area, and pesticides are often needed to control the ants. If you rent your home, ask the landlord to help you control the ants. Other tenants are probably having similar problems. Before you apply a pesticide, contact your local Extension office. They can offer advice about pesticides or recommend when to use a professional pest control company.

**DO NOT ATTRACT ANTS INSIDE**

**STEP 1**

Usually, ants come inside looking for food. Store foods (including pet food) in the refrigerator/freezer or store them in tightly sealed plastic, metal, or glass containers. sealed plastic bags will keep out most insects. If possible, store bagged pet food and birdseed outside in a tightly sealed container. Keep the kitchen clean. Rinse out soft drink cans or bottles before you throw them away. Wipe up spills right away. Do not leave dirty dishes standing on the counter or in the sink. Remember that Argentine ants prefer sweet foods.

Do not leave pet food out overnight. If you see ants trailing from the pet food bowl, you can place the food bowl in a larger container with water.

Adding water to the larger container makes a barrier between the pet food and the ants. Avoid making the area around your house attractive for ants: Do not feed your outside pets near the house. Remove piles of leaves, bricks, wood, or other items. Try to keep mulched areas dry. Ants often use natural bridges to get into the house. Trim tree branches and other vegetation away from the house.

**STEP 2**

If you see a trail of tiny ants that are all the same size, you probably have Argentine ants. Try to follow the trail back to the nest. During the warmer months, the nest is usually located near the house in mulch or leaf litter.

Nests of Argentine ants can be very large; part of the nest may be in your neighbor’s yard. The nests may also be in wall voids or behind the bricks on your house, especially in the late fall or winter months.

Do not forget to check flowerpots, window boxes, and other soil containers for ant colonies.

If you have ants of various sizes that sting, you probably have fire ants. Fire ant nests will usually be found near the house in sunny areas. Fire ants prefer areas of loose soil where they are not disturbed often. Look for raised mounds of earth, but fire ants do not always have mounds. Fire ants may also be in flowerpots or other soil that is not too dry.

Ant trails generally follow the sidewalk or countertop edge, a branch or wire, or along the baseboard or carpet. If you can find where the ants are coming in, seal the cracks with caulk. If the ants are entering through a drainage pipe, check with your landlord before you take any action, if you are a tenant.

**STEP 3**

If you can locate the nest, sprinkle ant bait around the nest site. Follow the directions on the ant bait. There are several ant bait products that you can use outdoors. DO NOT USE household chemicals like gasoline, motor oil, ammonia, or bleach to control insect pests. These chemicals can be VERY dangerous.

**STEP 4**

TREAT THE NEST!

The best time to treat fire ants is during the spring and fall. In addition to treating mounds, you can spread ant bait over your entire lawn to keep new mounds from forming. During the winter, do not use baits outdoors for Argentine ants. The nests are often moved during the colder months. Use ant bait made for indoor use. NEVER use outdoor pesticides indoors.

**GET HELP**

Ant problems may cover a large area, and pesticides are often needed to control the ants.