



Carpenter Ants

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Description Carpenter ants can be found outside on trees and sidewalks and indoor. Where they are found determines how best to control them. Inside they can be active indoors during many months of the year, usually during the spring and summer. When ants are active in the house during late winter/early spring (February/March), the infestation (nest) is probably within the household. In late spring large numbers of foraging ants may come in from outside looking for food and may not indicate an infestation. Outside carpenter ants become active in late spring and early summer and will be seen on tree trunks and sidewalks..

Identification Size: Large - from 1/4 inch (6.4mm) for a worker up to 3/4 inch (19.1mm) for a queen. Color: Black, or sometimes red and black. Hymenoptera: Formicidae, *Camponotus* spp.

Habitat Under natural conditions, carpenter ants nest in live and dead trees and in rotting logs and stumps. However, they will also construct their nests in structural wood. Nests are begun in moist soft wood. Nests are commonly found in porch pillars and roofs, windowsills, and wood in contact with soil. The natural food of the ants consists of honeydew from aphids, other insects, and plant juices, but they will readily forage for water and sugary food scraps within the house.

Life Cycle: The colonies of carpenter ants are often long lived. A single fertilized queen founds each colony. She establishes a nesting site in a cavity in wood. She then rears her first brood of workers, feeding them salivary secretions. She does not leave the nest nor feed herself throughout this period. The workers that are reared first assume the task of gathering food with which to feed the younger larvae. As the food supply becomes more constant, the colony population grows very rapidly. A colony does not reach maturity and become capable of producing young queens and males until it contains 2,000 or more workers. It may take a colony from three to six years or more to reach this stage. Each year thereafter, the colony will continue to produce winged queens and males, which leave their nest and conduct mating flights from May through July.



Photo of carpenter ant by Susan Ellis. Bugwood.org

Damage to trees: Carpenter ants do not damage sound wood, they make their galleries in water damaged wood that is soft or rotten. Large numbers of carpenter ants on a tree indicate that a tree has rot and is potentially hazardous. If you suspect that a tree has a carpenter ant nest, consider having an arborist check the tree for potential problems especially if the tree is near a house, trail, or walkway.

Damage to Structures: Carpenter ants rarely cause significant structural damage to buildings; their presence indicates that there is water damage somewhere in the building. Common places to find carpenter ants include eaves, window and doorframes, and next to chimneys. All are locations that often have water damage. Some recent evidence indicates that they can also cause extensive damage to foam insulation. Control of carpenter ant infestations requires that the nest be found. Once this is done, the infested wood can be removed or treated chemically, and causes of moisture damage to the wood can be corrected. The best procedure is to inspect all possible locations—and to select these locations on the basis of potential water exposure. If the nest cannot be located, consider using bait specifically for carpenter ants or for sweet feeding ants.

Interesting Facts: Ants of the genus *Camponotus* are known as carpenter ants because they house their colonies in galleries they excavate in wood. Carpenter ants do not eat the wood they remove during their nest-building activities, but deposit it outside entrances to the colony in small piles. The wood is used solely as a nesting site. The galleries are kept smooth and clean unlike termite tunnels that are lined with moist soil.