

CARPENTER ANTS

Carpenter ants are very common insects in the Inland Northwest. They are a problem to humans when they nest in houses and other wooden structures. Carpenter ants do **NOT** eat wood as termites do, but they destroy and remove wood in order to build nests. This activity can result in damage to structures, and if infestations are serious, unsafe conditions may result.

Identification

Carpenter ants, *genus Camponotus*, are comparatively large. Queens are about $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch long and workers between $\frac{1}{4}$ and $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch long. Carpenter ants can be identified by their evenly rounded thorax (middle body section). Other ants have notches or depressions in the thorax section. Carpenter ants vary in color from black to red to light brown. However, the most common carpenter ant in Washington is *Camponotus modoc*, which is black with reddish legs.



Camponotus modoc

Life Cycle

Ants undergo complete metamorphosis with four stages: egg, larva, pupa and adult. During the first warm days of the year, reproductives (winged males and winged queens) emerge and mate in flight. The males die afterward and a fertilized queen selects a nest site and lays her first eggs in a few days. The eggs hatch into larvae that pupate and eventually emerge as workers. The workers then begin foraging for food, excavating the nest, and rearing the next brood. The queen continues to lay eggs and the ant colony grows in numbers and in nest size. The colony will not produce reproductives again until it is three to ten years old and contains approximately 2000 workers. Carpenter ants eat other insects, secretions from aphids and other insects and sweet materials such as decaying fruit.

Signs of Infestation

It is important to determine if an infestation is actually present. Ants may be seen in houses while foraging or flying but may not be causing any problems. The best indication of a problem is the presence of the sawdust that ants throw out of their tunnels. Another indication is a foraging trail leading away from the house. This can usually be located at night when ants are most active. The sound produced by workers as they enlarge the nest can actually be heard in an infested wall.

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Control

Cultural - These controls are preventative. If colonies are located on your property, eliminate them. Remove scrap wood, stumps and logs. To prevent ants having easy access to the structure, do not pile firewood against structures and do not allow vegetation to contact structures. Ensure that houses are properly ventilated.

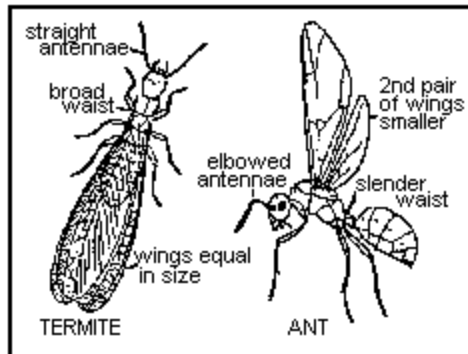
Accumulated moisture contributes to wood decay and provides the ideal habitat for ant colonies. Also avoid soil contact with wood. Supports for porches and decks should rest on cement. Take special care with lake and mountain cabins as they are usually in forested areas and are particularly vulnerable.

Biological - There are no known biological controls for carpenter ants.

Chemical - Read and follow all label directions when choosing and using a pesticide. Dust formulations are effective against ants when used inside wall voids and along ant trails inside the house. Liquid sprays are most effective for treating exterior surfaces such as foundations and siding.



carpenter ant



How to tell winged termites from ants

For more extensive information see EB 818 *Carpenter Ants: Their Biology and Control*