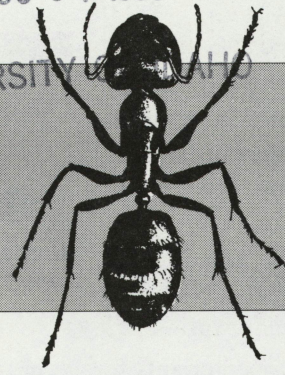


Carpenter ants

H. W. Homan and F. W. Merickel



Carpenter ants are serious building pests in northern Idaho and other mountainous areas with plentiful moisture. When carpenter ants occupy decomposing trees, stumps, or logs on the forest floor, they are beneficial. They become pests when they infest our homes and buildings.

Generally, carpenter ants establish their colonies in damp wood. Once established, they will tunnel into sound wood. Ant damage occurs when the ants hollow out the softer areas of the wood to establish shelter for their colony.

Carpenter ants do not eat the wood. When there is extensive tunneling in critical structural beams, the building may be damaged seriously requiring costly repairs.

Identification

Carpenter ants are large ants. The winged queens are almost 3/4 inch in length and the workers are from 1/4 to 1/2 inch long. The shape of their thorax differentiates them from other ants. From the side view, the dorsal surface of the carpenter ant thorax rounds evenly from front to back. All other ants either have a saddle-shaped dorsal thoracic surface or the rear is much lower than the front of the dorsal surface of the thorax.

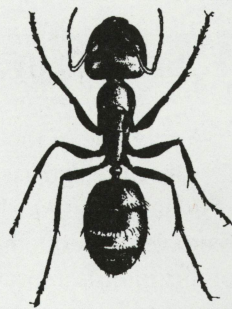
Don't confuse carpenter ant damage with termite damage. Both

insects damage wood. Termites eat the wood while carpenter ants cut the wood to make their home.

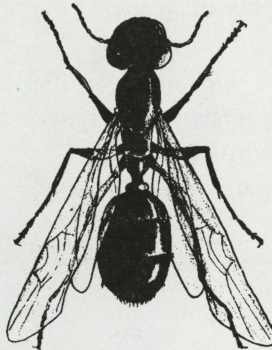
Carpenter ants throw out or dump coarse, sawdust-like material from the gallery exit where they are working. Termites deposit small, gray, granular, sand-like fecal material near their feeding sites.

Ants have a constricted waist between their thorax and abdomen while termites have no constriction (fig. 1). Ants are black to reddish brown while termites are dirty white to yellowish brown. Termites have straight antennae, and carpenter ants have angled or elbowed antennae.

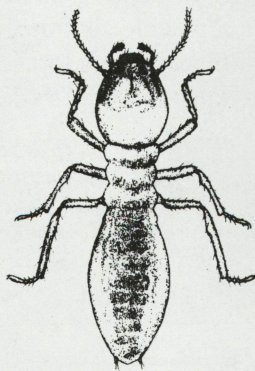
Fig. 1. Carpenter ants often are confused with termites.



Carpenter ant worker



Winged carpenter ant



Termite worker



Winged termite

Infestation signs

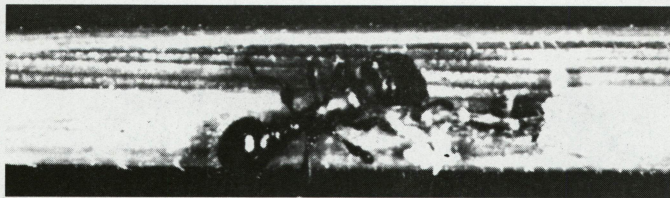
A well-established carpenter ant colony can damage beams, studs, and timbers in a building. It generally takes 3 to 6 years for a colony to become established well enough to start damaging the structure seriously. An exception to this is when you place a new building upon or next to a well-established colony.

You may have a carpenter ant problem in your home if you find:

- large ants foraging inside or around the building;
- sawdust piles under porches, floors, beams, in cracks, and partitions;
- slit-like holes in woodwork, window casings, and beams;

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- large, winged ants inside in late winter or early spring;
- or sometimes hear faint rustling or chewing sounds in the ceiling, woodwork, or floors at night.



Carpenter ants do not eat the wood. They tunnel into the wood to make their home.

Habits



Normally, carpenter ants forage in late evenings, early morning, and at night. They feed upon live or dead insects, honeydew from aphids and leafhoppers, sap from plants, well-ripened fruit, and refuse. Inside the house you may find them feeding upon meats, fats, any kind of sweets, and fruits.

Usually, ants nest in wood; however, you may find them in wall voids, hollow doors, inside stored furniture, foam insulation, boxes, and sometimes in the open inside the building.

Basically, there are three forms: the winged males, the winged females, and workers. The workers may be large or small, depending upon the health and age of the colony. The workers collect food, bring it back to share with the colony, and do the excavation of the gallery.

Prevention



Modify the ants' habitat the following ways:

- Before you build, remove stumps, limbs, and other debris from the building site to eliminate any nearby existing colony of carpenter ants.
- Eliminate sources of moisture in structures by grading the soil outside the house, fixing drains, patching the roof, repairing plumbing, and repairing the ventilation below the floor and soffits.
- Do not store firewood inside the house. Store firewood outside away from the building and off the ground.
- Prune shrubs and trees so they are not a bridge to the structure, and remove any ant-damaged trees and stumps.
- Check utility lines to prevent them from becoming a bridge for ants to your house.
- Destroy all known carpenter ant colonies within 100 yards of the house.
- Annually check for signs of ant infestation or reinvasion.

Treatment



If the colony is small, remove the nest and the ants with a vacuum and repair their entry. At dusk, take a flashlight and check the outside of the building to

see where the ants are entering the house. If you cannot find ants on the outside of the house, check the utility lines, shrubbery, tree limbs, areas along the walk, connections with the garage, and anything that touches the house. Eliminate any bridges to the house.

Place a barrier of insecticide between your house and the carpenter ants' food source. This usually means treating all around the foundation on the outside and all around the foundation in the crawl space. Repeated treatments may be necessary.

Chemical treatment



Apply **one** of the following insecticides as a barrier for the structure and use the amount listed on the container for residual spray. As a homeowner you may use chlorpyrifos, fenoxycarb, permethrin, propoxur, cypermethrin, cyfluthrin, or diazinon as a spray or boric acid or bendiocarb dust. The commercial applicator may use one of the above or a spray of bendiocarb or propetamphos.

If the job is too complicated to do yourself, then hire a reputable commercial applicator. Remember, it may take several years for a carpenter ant colony to do any damage to your home, so don't panic.



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Pesticide residues — These recommendations for use are based on currently available labels for each pesticide listed. If followed carefully, residues should not exceed the established tolerances. To avoid excessive residues, follow label directions carefully with respect to rate, number of applications, and minimum interval between application and reentry or harvest.

Trade names — To simplify information, trade names have been used. No endorsement of named products is intended nor is criticism implied of similar products not mentioned.

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