



# CONTROLLING ANTS IN YOUR HOUSE

In this area, the ants most frequently found invading homes are called Argentine ants (*Linepithema humile*). Although they can be pests, ants provide an ecological cleansing and fertilization service of considerable importance. For example, they kill and eat many pest insects, aerate the soil, and recycle dead animal and vegetable material.

Because of these beneficial aspects, it is undesirable (and probably downright impossible) to eliminate ants from their outside habitat. By knowing what species of ant is present helps you to determine the best method of control.

## DETECTION

Look for individual “scouts” or long lines of ants in or around the house near food or water. Distinguish Argentine ants from Carpenter ants by size. Argentine ants are small (1/8”), and their queens are slightly larger. Carpenter ants are 1/4” or larger and require different management techniques from those listed.

## LESS-TOXIC CONTROLS INSIDE YOUR HOME

- Kill the scouts so they can’t call in the hordes when they find a tasty tidbit.
- Use ant baits because they use a minimum of insecticide and confine use to a very small area (See “Tips for Using Ant Baits” on back.) Avoid baits in areas accessible to small children and pets.
- Use insecticidal dusts such as diatomaceous earth (DE) in wall voids and cracks before they are sealed. Use DE sold for pest control and not for pool filters. Use a hand duster to apply DE and wear a dust mask and goggles. DE has little toxicity to humans or pets, but kills insects by absorbing their outer waxy coating, causing dehydration and death.

## OUTSIDE YOUR HOME

- Use sticky barriers around the trunk of a tree or bush to prevent ants from protecting aphids and other “honeydew”-producing insects. Prune any branches that touch walls, fences or the ground so ants cannot find alternate routes onto the plant. Replenish or replace barrier when it collects enough dust or debris to allow ants to cross.
- Ant Baits. If you can find the spot outside where ants are entering the building (this is often difficult to do), place bait stations there; otherwise use baits only inside. Outside, rain and sprinklers can wash baits away, and you may end up attracting ants to your house.

## PREVENTION

- Store food in containers that seal tightly or in the refrigerator when you notice ant activity.
- Keep things clean and dry and fix leaking faucets and pipes (ants need food and water.)
- Caulk cracks where ants are entering the house. Weather-strip doors and windows.
- Put pet dishes in a soapy moat. Partially fill a wide, shallow container with soapy water and place pet dishes in the water where they are not touching the side of the container.

## QUICK FIX FOR AN ANT EMERGENCY

1. Find what ants are after (usually left-over food) and where they are entering the room (usually through a crack in the wall). Mark it so you can find it again.
2. For the moment, don't remove the food because ants will scatter. They are easier to kill in a line.
3. Clean up lines of ants with a vacuum, or spray ants with soapy water and wipe up with a sponge. Soap washes away the chemical trail ants follow. Always start in the kitchen area then the bathrooms. Work your way from the center of the house towards the edges.
4. Next, block entry point temporarily with a smear of petroleum jelly or a piece of tape. Use silicone caulk to permanently close cracks in walls, along moldings and baseboards, and in gaps around pipes and ducts.
5. If you can't find an entry point, clean up the ants (Step 3). Place the bait station on the line where the ants had been following away from small children and pets. Always remove the bait station when the line of ants has disappeared so you don't attract more ants into the house. (See "Tips for Using Ant Baits.")
6. If ants are nesting in a potted plant, move it outdoors. Water it thoroughly and place it in a bucket filled with water to an inch below the rim of the pot. Using a stick, make a bridge for the ants to get out of pot and bucket without getting in the water. The ants will soon begin carrying their white-colored young to safety. When no more ants emerge, drain the pot and return it to the house.

## TIPS FOR USING ANT BAITS

Ant baits contain a pesticide mixed with an attractive food substance. Ants take small quantities of bait back to their nest to share with their nest mates. In this way, the entire nest can sometimes be eliminated. Ant baits should be slow acting and never be too strong or it will kill the scouts before they can make it back to the colony to share with the rest of the ant population.

- Use baits with boric acid, Sulfluramid, hydra-methylnon, or fipronil as an active ingredient. Only use baits with arsenic as a last resort, they can be toxic to small children and pets.
- Effectiveness of baits will vary with ant species. For example, Argentine ants are attracted to sweet baits year-round, whereas baits that have a protein base are more effective in the spring months when the ant colony is producing brood. To determine what product to use, offer a small quantity of each type of bait and observe which the ants prefer.
- Use baits inside. (Outside you may attract more ants to the house, and rain and sprinklers will wash away bait).
- Never treat ants with an insecticide before beginning a bait program. If residual insecticide sprays are used, the foraging ants may die before they feed or take the bait back to the nest, counteracting the effectiveness of the bait.
- When ants are gone, remove the bait so you don't attract more ants. If the bait comes enclosed in a bait station, return it to its original box to save and use again. Put the box inside a plastic bag and seal it with a twist-tie.
- Baits may take several weeks to kill the ants. At first, you may see more ants coming to the bait, but after a few days to a week you should see a significant reduction.

## PRODUCTS

Examples of trade names of products listed in this fact sheet

**Desiccating Dust:** Concen® Diatomaceous Earth Crawling Insect Killer, Surefire Ant Killer

**Hand-Duster:** Pest Pistol®

**Sticky Barrier:** Tanglefoot® and Stickem® Tree Pest Barrier

**Baits containing Boric acid:** Terro® Ant Killer II (sweet based), Drax Ant Kil Gel® (sweet based), Drax Ant Kil pf (protein based)

**Baits containing Hydramethylnon:** Combat® Ant Control (protein)

**Baits containing Arsenic:** Grants® Kills Ants (sweet based)

**Baits containing Fipronil:** Combat® Quick Kill Formula (for ants, protein based)

## PESTICIDES & WATER POLLUTION

Pesticides can damage our health and kill beneficial insects necessary for a healthy garden. Common household pesticides show up in our waterways, sometimes at levels that can harm sensitive aquatic life.

The County of Ventura Environmental and Energy Resources Department is working with local nurseries and hardware stores to reduce the risks associated with pesticide use. This fact sheet is part of a series of informative publications and store displays designed to educate Ventura County residents about less-toxic pest management.



Look for the "Our Water Our World" logo next to products in participating nurseries and hardware stores throughout Ventura County. For a list of participating stores, call 805/289-3333 or visit <http://www.wasteless.org>

Pest control strategies and methods described in these publications are consistent with Integrated Pest Management (IPM) concepts, and are based on scientific studies and tests in actual home and garden settings. IPM is an environmentally sound approach to pest management combining various methods with good horticultural practices. Follow all label directions on any suggested products. NO endorsement of specific brand name product is intended, nor is criticism implied of similar products not mentioned. Different products with the same active ingredients are equally suitable.

## HOUSEHOLD HAZARDOUS WASTE COLLECTION PROGRAMS

Most cities offer FREE monthly collection events that accept pesticides, fertilizers, latex and oil based paint, motor oil and filters, car and household batteries, pool chemicals, stains, solvents, fluorescent light tubes, automotive fluids, cleaning products, photographic chemicals and more. For more information and collection schedules call 805/289-3333 or visit [www.wasteless.org](http://www.wasteless.org).

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

Participating stores have been provided books on Integrated Pest Management (IPM) you may use while in the store. The store staff has been extensively trained in IPM to assist you.

The Certified Master Gardener Program operated by the University of California Cooperative Extension provides a free assistance Helpline and offers a variety of workshops and school education programs. Call 805/645-1455.

### Check these websites:

<http://www.watoxics.org>

<http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu>

<http://www.pesticide.org/factsheets.html>

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