

# CARPENTER ANTS

## A COMPLETE GUIDE



**ALLIANCE**  
— PEST SERVICES —

Carpenter ants are a common problem throughout the United States. These are the largest of the ants and are almost always black. They can measure from 1/4 to 3/8 inch in length and cause a significant amount of damage to your home. Since they live in colonies, an infestation is possible and can mean big problems for your home.



Learning more about these insects can help you to identify a problem as well as understand what needs to be done. The sooner you notice a problem, the sooner you can contact your local pest control expert. This will alleviate any problems that you have around your home and potentially with the structure of your home. They can damage wood quickly, so you don't want these insects lingering for too long.

**You don't want these carpenter ants anywhere near wood because they are going to hollow it out and cause damage.**

**Within this book, you will learn:**

- How to identify carpenter ants
- The damage that can be done
- How to compare the damage to that of termites
- How to eliminate the ants
- How to prevent problems in the future

## IDENTIFYING CARPENTER ANTS

Carpenter ants are going to vary in size and color. Generally, they measure between 1/4 to 3/8 inch in length and have a blackish color to them. The female is winged and responsible for reproducing to create an entire colony. When a swarm is seen, it's almost a sure sign that there is a colony inside the home or elsewhere within the nearby area.

Something to note is that the life-cycle of a carpenter ant is relatively fast. A queen can lay between 9 and 16 eggs in the first year and she may live for 25 years. The eggs will complete a life-cycle within 6 to 12 weeks, providing more ants to cause problems within the wood.

After a colony gets larger, there may be winged reproductives that do not necessarily have to be female. These are called swarmers and can be seen during the warmer months. These can cause even more problems because they are able to travel further. They will lose their wings once they have mated. It is also important to note that there may be more than one queen within a colony, especially when it has been allowed to grow for several years. After about 6 years, a colony can consist of over 2,000 workers.

The easiest way to identify a carpenter ant is due to its size. It's the largest ant out there. It can also be told apart from termites by the larger size, the waist, the wings, and the elbowed antennae. Learning how to tell the difference is important so you know what you are working with around your home.

There are over a dozen species of carpenter ants found around the globe, though there are generally only two to be concerned with in the United States.

*Camponotus Pennsylvanicus* is a medium to large worker ant that has 1/4 to 1/2 inch in length. The thorax has an even roundness to it and

these black carpenter ants are some of the most common. There is a premise known as polymorphism within the colony, which means that all of the ants will not be the same size.

*Camponotus sayi* is another type of carpenter ant that has a reddish-brown head and thorax along with a blackish abdomen. These are commonly referred to as red carpenter ants, making them easy to distinguish from the black ones. These are also a little smaller, usually measuring from 3/16 to 1/4 inch in length.

The ants can live inside or outside. They are found almost always in moist wood that is either decaying or hollow. The passageways are then cut into the wood to make it easy for the ants to travel to all of the various sections of the nest. As the wood is hollowed out to create the passageways, the residue closely resembles pencil shavings.

Many people believe that carpenter ants eat wood. This is not actually the case. Termites eat wood. Carpenter ants are a danger because they nest inside of the wood. Their diet actually consists of live and dead insects, sweets, fats, and meats. This means that they could be attracted to the food inside your house – or near your BBQ area.

The black carpenter ants can actually travel as far as 300 feet from their colony. This means that if you see one or two of these ants inside your home, the colony may not actually be inside as well.

These ants are most active at night. They will often emerge after dusk and then only return to the colony after dawn. During the day, there will be some foraging. They do make noise within their colony that sounds like the crinkling of cellophane. It is one of the ways that a pest control expert can identify the presence of a colony somewhere within a structure. A stethoscope can be used to hear the sounds behind walls and other areas.

## THE DAMAGE THAT CAN BE DONE

Carpenter ants damage wood as a way of creating a nest for themselves and their entire colony. Commonly referred to as galleries, these are passageways that are cut inside of the wood so that they can make it from one area of the nest to another. It may be possible to see the damage that they have created in a number of ways. Some people may notice an ant roaming through the home or on the outside of the home, such as near roof eaves, under windows, on decks and porches, and other areas that are susceptible to moisture.

Others may notice that there is a pile of what appears to be pencil shavings near a structure of wood. This is what remains when the ants have hollowed out the wooden structure.

Still others may see the damage within the actual structure of the wood. As the wood is continuously hollowed out, it can weaken the structure until the integrity is gone and the wood collapses. This is usually a problem once the colony has been at a location for a significant amount of time.

While the mandibles of a carpenter ant are strong, they do not chew through dry wood. Instead, they are going to chew through wood that has been moistened, making it easier for them to gain larger grounds. Moisture, decay, or other insects will soften the wood, allowing them to make their entry.

The damage can be considerable, especially if the problem is allowed to exist for many years. As the wood is tunneled, the stability of the

### **The most common problems exist with:**

- Exterior columns, decks, porches, and steps
- Sills, joists, sub floors
- Doors, windows, frames



wood is jeopardized and this can lead to the same kind of damage as can be expected with termites or wood rot. The wood will simply collapse, which can be detrimental depending upon what the wood was responsible for holding up.

There are also problems periodically in roofing trim and siding, rafters and sheathing, as well as flooring, walls, and interior trim. Learning to schedule periodic inspections of these areas can identify an issue as soon as it starts in order to eliminate the threat early on.

Another aspect of carpenter ants that many people don't realize is that they can bite. If the nest is disturbed, the ants will bite out of defense. Since they are large, the bite can break the skin and be very painful. There is also formic acid that can be sprayed into the bite as a defense mechanism – and this can make the bite that much worse. They use this mechanism as a defense against other insects when their area is threatened, though it can also be used against your family.



## COMPARING DAMAGE TO THAT OF TERMITES

Many people see wood damage and instantly think of termites. However, there are some parts of the country where termites are not a problem – and others where carpenter ants are not a problem. Then there are those areas where both pose major problems. This is when it's of the utmost importance to be able to identify the culprit of the damage.

There are two types of termites that can cause damage to wood: drywood and subterranean. It's possible to tell a carpenter ant's work from the work of the two termites' work in various ways and using different characteristics.

Carpenter ants leave dry shavings just as drywood termites do. However, termites also leave behind fecal pellets that are about the same size and shape. This means that a simple analysis of fecal matter can be the point of distinction.

When it comes to carpenter ants and subterranean termites, the carpenter ants polish the wood galleries to look smooth inside, where termites do not. The unwanted debris is ejected out of the hole, which is not the case with the subterranean termites.

There are many homeowners that are relieved to hear that they do not have termites because of the damage that termites have been known to cause. However, carpenter ants can cause a significant amount of damage over time, which is why they are still a cause for concern. As the colony grows, there will be more damage.

Once you learn that you have carpenter ants, you want to get rid of the problem quickly so that you don't allow the colony to grow any larger than it already is. As soon as you remove the colony, you can prevent any further damage from occurring to the wooden structures of your home.

**Some of the most common questions that you have about treating the problems are ones such as:**

What kinds of ants do I have?

Where do they come from?

How do I get rid of them?

Now that you know the answers to the first two questions, it's important to address how to get rid of them.

## HOW TO TREAT PROBLEMS

The first step is to identify where the colony is located. Once it is located, then there are various methods that can be used to help get rid of the problem. The popular methods are reviewed below.

### INSECTICIDAL DUST

Insecticidal dust is one of the most common ways to deal with the presence of carpenter ants and this is because the dust will spread to other areas of the wood and stick to the ants in order for it to travel back to the nest. The dust can be sprayed into the voids of walls and other areas. It is important to use the treatments with the utmost care to ensure that humans or pets do not come into contact with the dust

### LIQUID INSECTICIDES

Liquid insecticides can be used to deal with some of the foraging workers, but will not be that successful overall. The reason is that the liquid cannot penetrate the wood in its entirety and therefore will not be able to reach the entire colony. The colony will therefore live on and continue to be a nuisance.

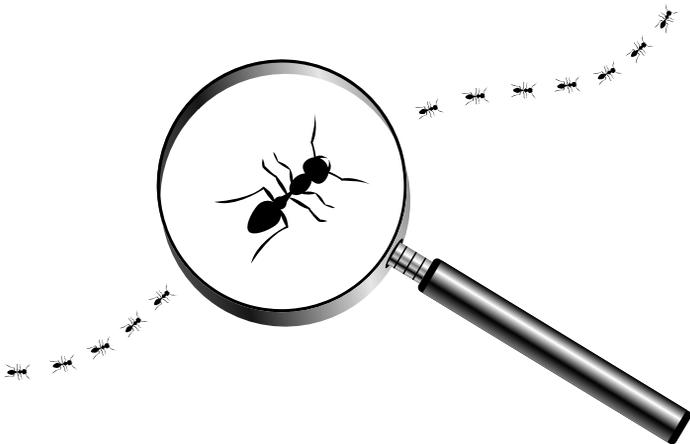
## BAITS

In some instances, baits have been used to lure ants to it so that they can take the food back to their colony and everyone can be exposed. However, carpenter ants have a varied diet and therefore baits are not that successful.

## DISCARDING INFESTED WOOD

Sometimes, one of the easiest ways to get rid of the carpenter ants is to get rid of the infested wood. If the ants have taken over a particular area of the home or yard, you may find that you simply want to get rid of this wood so you no longer have a problem. This wood could be a firewood pile in the backyard, a rotten tree stump, or even a portion of your home's structure that can be cut away and then replaced.

If you start to look for over-the-counter products, you are going to be inundated with ones that claim that they can take care of a carpenter ant problem. However, there are going to be issues in terms of knowing what chemicals to use as well as what the best application method is going to be. There have also been recent reports where the ants have grown immune to the over-the-counter chemicals, which means they won't be killed.





It is often necessary to go with a more potent product and have a professional that will handle the application in order to identify the location of the nest as well as know how to get the chemical into the voids so that the issue is taken care of properly.

A pest control expert is going to have the knowledge to identify the ants, locate the colony, and get rid of the situation. Appropriate equipment will be used to get rid of the ants, which can include vacuuming the ants. There is a significant amount of expertise needed to treat the wall void and eliminate the problem 100 percent.

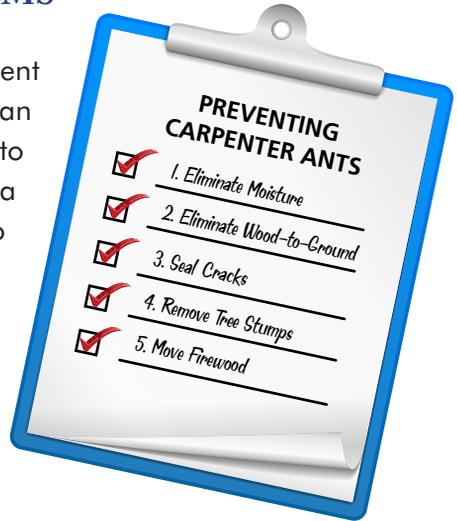
The most effective solution will always be the one to target the colony so that the problem does not continue to live on, which can in turn cause more damage to the wood of your home.

Should you discover carpenter ants crawling around the wood of your home or you have noticed tunnels within some of your wooden structures, you will want to call a pest control company sooner rather than later. The longer you wait, the more damage you could end up with.

When you locate a pest control company, there are some things that you will want to look for. Find a company that will look for the colony as opposed to squirting an expensive treatment into every exterior wall void. Additionally, be sure that a monthly spray isn't being charged. This isn't a necessity when dealing with carpenter ants. Once the colony is exposed to the treatment, the problem is taken care of. A follow up should be offered, however, to ensure that the treatment was effective in solving the issue.

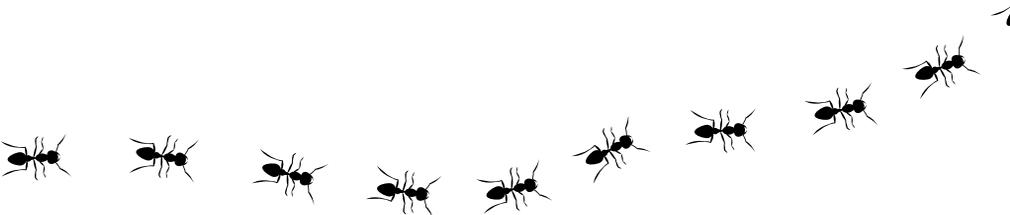
## HOW TO PREVENT PROBLEMS

You may be wondering how to prevent problems so you never experience an issue with carpenter ants – or you want to make sure they don't come back after a pest control expert has helped you to eliminate a colony. There are a few steps that you can take to prep your home and reduce the possibility for carpenter ants showing their face around your house.



1. Eliminate moisture problems, such as leaking roofs or plumbing problems. Moisture will attract the ants.
2. Eliminate as much wood-to-ground contact as possible, such as when landscaping is touching the wood siding of a home.
3. Seal cracks in the foundation.
4. Remove dead tree stumps from the property.
5. Stack firewood away from the home. Do not store it inside the home or the garage since it is a prime nesting site for carpenter ants.

By following these tips, you may be able to eliminate future problems of carpenter ants.



# **ALLIANCE**

**PEST SERVICES**



For More Information On  
**CARPENTER ANTS**

Contact:  
ALLIANCE PEST SERVICES

**800-698-4530**

[AlliancePestServices.com](http://AlliancePestServices.com)

Copyright 2014 Alliance Pest Services