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Carpenter ants

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## Quick Facts

Large black or brown carpenter ants, winged or wingless, can cause serious damage if permitted to remain in structural wood of a building.

Winged carpenter ants often are mistaken for termites--a more serious problem.

Winged ants inside a home or outside year-round indicate an infestation; seasonal presence is not as serious.

Locating all nests is the most important and difficult step in controlling carpenter ants.

Several insecticides can be used to treat nests and ant trails.

Preventive measures will guard against carpenter ant infestations.

Winged carpenter ants often are mistaken for termites--a more serious problem. Termites (Figure 3) are easily distinguished from ants by straight rather than elbowed antennae; by forewings and hindwings of equal size; and most notably by the lack of the "wasp waist" just behind the legs, which all ants have. Wingless forms are large, usually black, ants. They also are distinguished from other ants by a single segment forming the "wasp waist" front of the abdomen and by the smooth arched profile of the back above the legs.

Large numbers of winged forms will emerge from a nest, usually during spring or early summer. They accumulate at windows and doors trying to find new nesting sites. Winged forms inside a home indicate a three- to four-year-old infestation that has considerable damage potential.

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## Description

Carpenter ants prefer to nest in decayed, often water-damaged wood. Occasionally they will move into the sound structural wood of a building. If they are permitted to remain there, serious damage can result.

Carpenter ants are large black or brown insects in wingless (see Figure 1) and winged forms (see Figure 2).

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1. Colorado State University Cooperative Extension entomologist and associate professor, entomology. 1/92. ©Colorado State University Cooperative Extension. 1994. For more information, contact your county Cooperative Extension office.

Another sign of infestation is the year-round presence of wingless forms searching for food. They will be attracted to all sorts of animal and vegetable matter.

If their presence is seasonal the nest is outdoors and they enter the house in search of food. In such cases, there will be an obvious path which can be followed back to the nest. Treat the path and nest with one of the insecticides suggested below. Remove the infested wood and replace it if necessary.

Additional warning signs of carpenter ant activity are faint rustling noises (other insects and animals can also make such noises) in walls and small piles of sawdust in isolated areas, such as crawlspaces or dark closets.

### Control of Infestations

The most important and difficult step in controlling carpenter ants is locating all of the nests. Check areas of the home that have had excess moisture problems, since carpenter ants frequently get their start in moist, decayed wood. Closely examine wood in contact with soil. Check house areas with a history of ant activity. Tap suspect wood and listen for rustling noises or movement.

Hollow-sounding wood also may indicate a problem. A sharp knife will easily penetrate the surface of infested wood. Once located, carpenter ant nests are distinguished from other insect damage by the presence of wide, irregular galleries that are smooth-surfaced and free of debris. Do not end the search with the discovery of a single nest, but when all potentially affected areas have been checked.

Extensively damaged wood may have to be replaced. If not, the nest and ant trails can be treated with an insecticide. Bendiocarb (Ficam) 1 percent dust, diazinon 5 percent dust, diazinon spray, chlorpyrifos (Dursban) spray, and propoxur (Baygon) spray are available. Boric acid powder (Borid, Enuf, Roach Prufe, Roach Ridd, Roach Kil, etc.) can be used in areas inaccessible to children and pets. Poison ant baits have not worked well with carpenter ants. As with any insecticide, **be sure to read and follow all label instructions.**

### Preventing Infestations

Several steps can prevent the occurrence or recurrence of carpenter ant infestations:

- \* Correct any moisture problems that exist around the home, particularly in areas that have drainage or aeration problems (such as leaking roofs, gaps in siding, clogged gutters or faulty plumbing).
- \* Trim shrubbery and trees away from the house.
- \* Replace water-damaged or decayed wood. Wood should not be in contact with soil. (This is also important in preventing termite damage.)
- \* Remove stumps and dead trees (a 50-foot cleared perimeter around the house is recommended).
- \* It is not necessary to remove healthy trees, but broken branches and any other damage or holes in nearby trees should be repaired or eliminated.
- \* Store firewood away from the house, preferably off the ground. This will minimize other insect problems associated with firewood. Bring inside only firewood that is about to be burned; examine and discard heavily infested pieces.

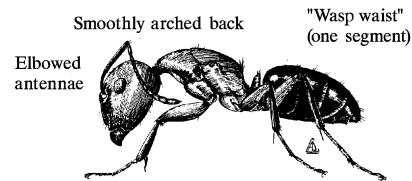


Figure 1: Carpenter ant worker.

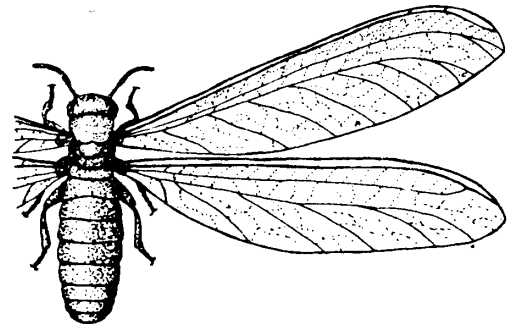


Figure 2: Termite, winged form.

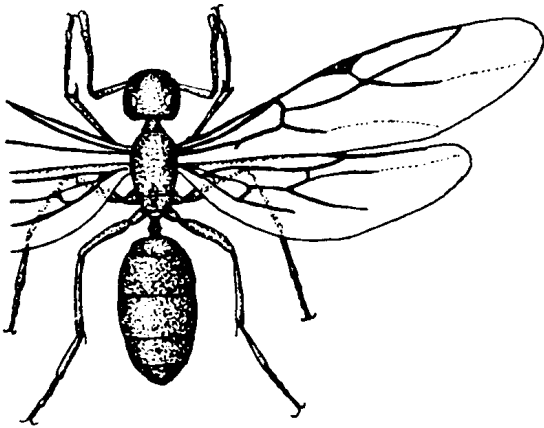


Figure 3: Carpenter ant, winged form.