

CONTROLLING ANTS IN YOUR HOUSE

In Southern California, the ants most frequently found invading our homes are called Argentine ants. 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. The best approach to ant management is to try to keep them outdoors.

We can conserve today by reducing our use of hazardous chemicals that contaminate our environment and threaten our health and that of future generations.

DETECTION

Look for individual “scouts” or long lines of ants in or around the house near food or water. Distinguish Argentine ants from fire ants by size and color. Argentine ants are dark brown and small ($\frac{1}{8}$ "), and their queens are slightly larger. Fire ants are reddish-brown and $\frac{1}{16}$ " to $\frac{1}{4}$ " and require different management techniques from those listed below for Argentine ants.

LESS-TOXIC CONTROLS

INSIDE YOUR HOME

- **Wipe up scouts with soapy water** 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 it to a very small area (see “Tips for Using Ant Baits” on back).
- **Use insecticidal dusts** such as diatomaceous earth (DE) in wall voids and cracks before they are sealed. 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 into the plant.
- **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.

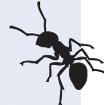
PREVENTION

- **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.





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. If you can't find an entry point, see Step 5.
2. Don't remove the food until after Step 3 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.
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) to a convenient (preferably out-of-the-way) spot. Place the bait station on the line the ants had been following. 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 that comes 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. 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.

- Use baits with boric acid and orthoboric acid, sulfuramid, avermectin and abamectin, and sodium tetraborate as an active ingredient.
- Keep several different baits on hand because Argentine ants change their food preferences frequently. If one bait is not working, try another. Wait at least a day to see if they take the bait.
- Use ant baits inside and only when ants invade. If you leave baits out

continuously either inside or outside, you run the risk of attracting more ants to your house. Outside, rain and sprinklers can wash away bait.

- Do not spray insecticide around the bait; it will repel the ants.
- When ants are gone, remove the bait so you don't attract more ants. If the bait you are using 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 and other pesticides should be disposed of at the City's Household Hazardous Waste Center.
- 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: Safer Brand® Ant and Crawling Insect Killer

Hand-duster: Pest Pistol® (If unavailable locally, call (888)784-1722 to order.)

Sticky barrier: Tanglefoot® and Stickem® Tree Pest Barrier

Baits containing boric acid: Victor® Liquid Ant Killing System

Baits containing sodium tetraborate: Terro® Liquid Ant Bait, Grants® Kills Ants

Baits containing sulfuramid: FluorGuard® Ant Control Bait, Raid® Double Control Ant Baits

Baits containing avermectin and abamectin: Raid® Ant Bait, Advance® Granular Ant Bait

PESTICIDES AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Pesticides are designed to kill or repel undesired pests. However, many will also harm beneficial insects, birds, aquatic life, reptiles, pets, and even humans. Pesticides can potentially cause a wide variety of health effects in humans, and children face relatively higher risks from pesticide exposure than do adults exposed at the same levels. Recent research shows that common household pesticides show up in treated wastewater and wash off lawns and gardens. These pesticides end up contaminating bodies of water, including the Santa Monica Bay. This fact sheet is part of a series of information pieces aimed at educating Santa Monica area residents about less-toxic pest management techniques.

Pest control strategies and methods described in this publication are consistent with integrated pest management (IPM) concepts, and are based on scientific studies and tests in actual home and garden settings. Use suggested products according to label directions and dispose of unwanted or leftover pesticides at a household hazardous waste collection facility or event. No endorsement of specific brand name products is intended, nor is criticism implied of similar products that are not mentioned.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Bio-Integral Resource Center (BIRC)
(510) 524-2567

Santa Monica Environmental Programs Division
458-2255

www.santa-monica.org/environment

Free Disposal of Hazardous Products

Santa Monica residents only
Household Hazardous Waste Center
458-2113

L.A. County residents
1-888-CLEAN-LA

Fire ant infestations
1-888-434-7326

University of California IPM website
www.ipm.ucdavis.edu

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Choose less-toxic products for your home and garden.