

Carpenter Ant Control

**University of Idaho
Extension**
Kootenai County
1808 N. 3rd Street
Coeur d'Alene, Idaho 83814

Phone: (208) 446-1680
FAX: (208) 446-1690
E-mail: kootenai@uidaho.edu
Web: extension.uidaho.edu/kootenai



Compiled by Dorothy Kienke, Master Gardener Assistant Coordinator

Carpenter ants are usually found nesting in standing trees (living or dead), in stumps or in logs on the forest floor. They may be present in bark and decorative wood pieces used to enhance the beauty of the yard, or in firewood stacked nearby. They also make their home in stumps and wood that may have been buried in the landscape when the house was constructed. The colonies found outdoors in the landscape are known as the “parent” colonies and those found in dwellings are known as “satellite” colonies.

The ants usually maintain a trail between the parent and satellite colonies. These trails follow the natural contour of the landscape and take the path lines of least resistance. They frequently cut across lawns. Traffic on these trails may be noticeable during the day, but peak traffic occurs after sunset and continues throughout the night, sharply decreasing before sunrise. To effectively control the carpenter ants in a dwelling it is important to locate and treat both parent and satellite colonies as well as the trail. Treatment to satellite nests in wall voids, crawl spaces under buildings or attic crawl spaces are best left to professional pesticide applicators.

Most carpenter ants establish their initial nest in decayed wood, but once established, they extend their tunneling into sound wood. The ants do not eat the wood, but mine the wood by removing large quantities of it to expand their nesting facilities. The presence of sawdust is the best indicator that carpenter ants are at work. Another indication is the sound produced by the workers as they excavate the tunnels. The sound can often be heard adjacent to the infested wall. The ants also have a network of trails they use to travel about the house. Most frequently used are the tops of water pipes and electrical wires.

Once the colony is located, chemical treatment can provide good control. This consists of direct treatment of the colony and a perimeter spray against the foundation of the house.

Steps in controlling Carpenter Ants

- Correct any moisture problems such as leaking roofs, leaking chimney flashing or plumbing, poorly ventilated attics or crawl spaces
- Replace all rotted or water damaged wooden parts of the structure and eliminate wood to soil contact
- Trim all trees and bushes so no branches touch or come close to any part of the structure
- Reduce dead stumps and logs on property within at least 50 feet of structure
- Store firewood well away from the home, and bring only enough into the home that will be used quickly
- Consider non-organic mulches and ground covers near the house, rather than bark or other wood products
- Seal entry holes into the home around wiring, pipes, cables with caulking, or plug with steel wool.

Chemical control- Some formulations are labeled for indoor/outdoor use and others list only indoor use on the label. Products used indoors **MUST** be labeled for indoor use.

Dust formulations are effective because ants are hairy and the dust adheres to the surface of their bodies. As they clean themselves and feed other ants and larvae, the insecticide is spread rapidly throughout the colony. Dust formulations are effective only if kept dry, and are therefore ineffective as exterior treatments.

Some bait is available in granular form, and can be used for direct treatment of ant mounds in the landscape. In the treatment of exterior surfaces such as foundations, foraging trails, and under the lower edge of the siding, liquid sprays are preferred. Cyfluthrin is registered for a wide range of crawling, flying and wood infesting pests including carpenter ants. Some formulations are registered for indoor-outdoor use and others for outdoor use only. Pyrethrum can be used indoors if indicated on the label, as can some of the boric acid baits. Bifenthrin, permethrin and cypemethrin are modified pyrethrum pest control products and are available in several formulations. They can be used as perimeter treatments around dwellings according to the label. Always read and follow the label, and do not use products labeled for 'outdoor use only' indoors.

Adapted from bulletin EB 818, Carpenter Ants: Their Biology and Control, PNW Insect Control Handbook, and label information and PNW Insect Handbook.

Updated Nov. 2013