

## Beneficial Insect Profile



**Photo credit:** April Nobile, California Academy of Sciences  
(Specimen CASENT0005718; from <https://www.antweb.org>)

**Common Name:** Western harvester ant

**Scientific Name:** *Pogonomyrmex occidentalis*

**Order and Family:** Order Hymenoptera; Family Formicidae

**Size and Appearance:**

	Length (mm)	Appearance
<b>Egg</b>		
<b>Larva/Nymph</b>		
<b>Adult</b>	Workers range from 5 – 7 mm	<p><i>Pogonomyrmex</i> harvester ants are characterized by broad, boxy heads, 12-segmented antennae, a two-part waist, a pair of dorsal spines and a stinger. Many species have a set of long hairs (called a psammophore) on the posterior lower portion of the head, behind the mouthparts.</p> <p>The Western harvester ant is light to medium red and shiny, often with a slightly lighter gaster (last few segments of the abdomen). These ants are highly sculptured with punctate texture on the head and thorax. The thorax also has lines of texture (rugae).</p>

		<p>The colonies have one queen (monogynous).</p> <p>Queens are similar to workers but larger with a larger thorax.</p> <p>Female and male reproductive ants have wings.</p>
<b>Pupa (if applicable)</b>		

**Type of feeder (Chewing, sucking, etc.):** Chewing

**Host(s):** Harvester ants in the genus *Pogonomyrmex* specialize in seeds but may forage on other foods (generalist and opportunistic).

**Description of Benefits (predator, parasitoid, pollinator, etc.):**

Although the western harvester ant specializes on seeds, they also eat a number of insect pests including grubs and termites.

Native Americans used these ants to rid their blankets of fleas by placing the blankets on the mounds. The ants have also been used to clean dead animals, leaving only the bones.

Because this species forages small pebbles for their mounds, mineral prospectors check the mounds for important minerals such as uranium and gold and for microfossils. Farmers have been known to feed this gravel to chickens for the grinding activity of the chicken's gizzards.

The western harvester ant is found in the USA, including Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Montana, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota, Wyoming, and Utah.

**References:**

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Schmidt, J.O. (2003). Venoms. In R.H. Resh & R. T. Carde. (Eds.) *Encyclopedia of insects* (1160 – 1163). Amsterdam: Academic Press.

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