

# Beneficial Species Profile



**Photo credit:** Dr. David P. Hughes; Hughes Lab, Penn State University

**Common Name:** Zombie Ant Fungus

**Scientific Name:** *Ophiocordyceps unilateralis*

**Order and Family:** Hypocreales; Ophiocordycipitaceae

**Size and Appearance:**

	Length (mm)	Appearance
<b>Egg</b>		
<b>Larva/Nymph</b>		Spores are found on the ground waiting to be picked up by ants
<b>Adult</b>		The stalk is wiry and flexible; darkly pigmented and extends the length of the ant's head; close to the tip there is a small flask-shaped fruiting body that releases spores
<b>Pupa (if applicable)</b>		

**Type of feeder (Chewing, sucking, etc.):** Spores that release a chemical

**Host/s:** Carpenter Ants

**Description of Benefits (predator, parasitoid, pollinator, etc.):** This fungus releases spores that drop to the rainforest floor and then attach onto unsuspecting ants. Once the spores are attached, they inject a chemical into the ant's brain, making it become disoriented and move to certain locations on plants. There the ant uses its mandibles to affix itself to a leaf or branch and

eventually dies. Once the ant is dead, the fungus rapidly grows and starts to form a fruiting body that extrudes from the ant's head. If the ant is not removed from the colony, then the whole colony can become infected.

## References:

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