

Carpenter Ants

A CAROLINA™ CareSheet

General Information and Behavior

Carpenter ants are very robust ants, sometimes found in or around homes. Nests can be found outdoors in stumps, logs, hollow trees, dead limbs, and firewood. In homes, the ants are considered pests because of the tunnels they gnaw into the supporting wood of the structure. Eventually this damage causes structural weakening. Over time, the ants create galleries of tunnels.

Carpenter ants leave tiny, telltale “sawdust” piles under their tunnel openings since they do not eat the wood that they remove. The ants are attracted to wood that has been weakened by moisture. Infestations of these ants can be avoided by reducing or preventing moisture in wood, removing food sources, avoiding long-term storage of wood in or around the home, storing food and garbage in sealed containers, caulking openings, and providing good ventilation under the home. Carpenter ants are most active at night. It is then that they leave the nest to forage for food. Their typical foods include aphid honeydew, other insects (living and dead), plant juices, and food products containing fats, meats, or sugar. The most active seasons for tunneling are spring and summer.

Physical Description

Carpenter ants range in size from 4–w inches (6 mm–2 cm). The body consists of a head, thorax, and abdomen. The thorax is usually rounded. As with other ants, the “waist” is constricted and the antennae are bent. The body color ranges from red to brown to black. There is a circle of tiny hairs on the tip of the abdomen.

Colony Structure and Organization

The colony originates when a queen begins a nest in a piece of old wood. A carpenter ant colony can be a single- or multiple-location system. It can survive for up to 20 years in a structure and contain as many as 10,000 individuals. The colony consists mainly of a queen and all her workers in a single area. The main job of the wingless workers is to enlarge nests, forage for food, and care for the larvae. A multiple colony may have one queen in a main colony with as many as 10 satellite colonies linked by tunnels. The workers are frequently exchanged between the main colony and the satellite colonies. After 3–6 years, colonies may produce winged males and females known as swarmers. These flying ants emerge from May to July and aid in the establishment of new colonies.

Life Cycle

The life cycle of carpenter ants is an example of complete metamorphosis— egg, larva, pupa, and adult. In each colony there is at least one queen and only a few reproductive males and females. Mating takes place in flight by these reproductive swarmer ants. Shortly after mating, the male dies. Each fertilized female (a future queen) loses her wings and selects a nesting site. The eggs are small, white, and oval. They hatch into larvae which are nourished by the queen until they pupate. After the first offspring emerge as adults, these wingless workers begin to take care of the queen and her subsequent offspring. Future offspring tend to be larger, due to better care. During periods of warm temperatures, the entire cycle from egg to adult can be completed in 3 months.

Care and Handling

The carpenter ants we ship are normally used as a food source for other animals. They should be kept in a

cool area (such as a refrigerator) until needed so that they will survive longer and be more easy to handle due to their sluggish movement. If you wish to provide nourishment for them, provide a few pieces of any sweetened cereal or a sugar-water solution on a sponge.

Important Note: It is illegal to ship queen ants since infestation could occur.

Problems? We hope not, but if so contact us. We want you to have a good experience.

Orders and replacements: 1-800-334-5551 then select Customer Service

Technical Support and Questions: caresheets@carolina.com



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