

# URBAN PEST NEWS



## Agent Notes

I'm anxiously waiting to see what this year will bring us. Many people want me to predict what pests will be a problem since we have had little rainfall, but I'm unsure what will happen. As always, please contact me if you require Structural Pest Control Board CEUs. I am happy to provide these to you free of charge. Contact me at 512.854.9600.

## Termites in Mulch?

Recently I received several emails on the topic of formosan termites being moved into Texas, carried in mulch from the southern part of Louisiana. While parts of the email were true, others were misleading.

Yes, formosans infest trees in southern Louisiana and many of those trees were blown over by the hurricane. The trees were put through a wood chipper to create mulch which would be a process difficult for termites to survive. Also, the mulch is being moved to landfills that are under quarantine. If mulch is being moved out of Louisiana, it is being done so illegally. If your customers purchase mulch, have them inspect it and if it is infested, they should return it to the store.

## Formosan Termites

Formosan termites are an imported type of subterranean termite that are considered the most aggressive and economically damaging termite in the U.S. These termites attack a wider variety of cellulose material and at a greater rate than regular subterranean termites.

Formosan soldiers have tear-drop shaped head capsules with a fontanelle, or frontal gland pore.



Formosan swarmers are larger than regular subterranean termites and have antennae with 18 segments while natives have less segments. Wings of formosan swarmers are covered with hairs, while native termite wings are almost bare.

Formosan termites will often make aerial nests of chewed wood, saliva and fecal material; called a carton nest. Carton nests can hold enough moisture to allow survival without contact with soil.



Formosan colonies usually have several thousand termites, but it is not unusual to find colonies with several million. Colonies consume more wood than native termite colonies.

## Can you tell the difference?

Antennae elbowed

No wing stub

Middle part of body is narrow or constricted



Wings not alike in shape, size or pattern with few veins

Antennae not elbowed

Stub left when wing detaches

Middle part of body not narrow



Wings similar in shape, size & pattern with many veins



# Oak Leaf Rollers

Oak leaf rollers have one generation per year. Eggs hatch in March and caterpillars remain for 4-6 weeks. The caterpillars feed on foliage of trees, mainly oak. In April and May, caterpillars pupate on the tips of twigs, in crevices of bark or on plants that are near the tree on which they were feeding. Later in May, adults emerge, mate and lay new eggs which remain on the tree until the following spring.

Caterpillars of the oak leaf roller are usually the most visible stage, the one most people complain about. These caterpillars are creamy white to greenish with a brownish-black head capsule. Most people run into oak leaf roller caterpillars while they are dangling from trees by a silken thread.

These caterpillars are more of a nuisance than a true pest. Most healthy trees can withstand defoliation without significant damage, but there is concern this year since the drought may also be causing stress to trees.

Applying horticultural oil smothers eggs, but application must be done at the proper time of year. *Bacillus thuringiensis* variety *kurstaki*, a biological pesticide that targets only caterpillars, can be used to manage the larval stage. When using *Bacillus thuringiensis*, or Bt, good coverage is key since caterpillars need to consume a lethal amount of the toxin. Other possible control methods would be active ingredients such as spinosad (spinosyns) or carbaryl.



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# Leaf Cutter Ants

Leaf cutting ants are one of nature's original farmers. Worker ants remove plant material such as leaves or buds from weeds, grasses, trees, shrubs and forage crops. Plant material is not consumed by the ants, but is "fed" to a fungus garden that they tend. The ants raise one particular type of fungus to feed upon and destroy all other types of fungus that may grow in the garden.

Leaf cutting ants are reddish-brown with polymorphic, or differing size, workers. Workers have three pairs of prominent spines on the thorax and one pair of spines on the back of the head which distinguishes them from similar ants.

Leaf cutting ants live in large colonies that may exceed 2 million ants. Colonies are typically located in well-drained sandy loam soils and can expand to cover almost ¼ acre. Colonies can be located by looking for areas with several crater shaped mounds.

Leaf cutter ants forage during the day throughout winter, spring and fall, but forage at night during the summer to avoid the heat. They are usually inactive on cold, wet or cloudy days.

Two bait products are available for use on leaf cutter ants- Grant's Total Ant Killer Bait and Amdro Ant Block. Both use hydramethylnon as the active ingredient. It is also possible to treat ants using a spot treatment with products containing fipronil or chlorfenapyr. Plants can also be protected temporarily using contact-kill insecticides around the base of the plant or on foraging trails.

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