

URBAN IPM NEWS

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Termites

There are various kinds of termites found in Texas with the most commonly encountered being subterranean, formosan (a type of subterranean termite) and drywood termites.

Termites feed on cellulose material. They do not directly digest the cellulose; they have microorganisms in their digestive tract that break down cellulose so the termites can absorb the nutrients. Cellulose material is digested by worker termites and older nymphs who then share the digested food with others in the colony.

New colonies are normally created by swarming. Swarming is when reproductive (winged) termites leave the nest and fly some distance away. Once the termites land, the surviving males and females will pair up, shed their wings and search for a suitable nesting site. When a site is located, the pair will either form a chamber or enter wood directly (drywood termites), mate and begin to lay eggs. After the first eggs hatch and larvae develop, the colony becomes more stable allowing the queen to lay more eggs.

Subterranean termites have nests in the soil and must maintain contact with soil or an above-ground moisture source to survive. If subterraneans venture above ground they make shelter tubes of fecal material, saliva and soil to protect themselves. Mating flights of subterranean termites usually occur early in the day, between January and May.

Formosan termites are a more aggressive type of subterranean termite. These termites have been spread throughout Texas through transport of infested material or soil. Formosan termites build carton nests that are very characteristic. These carton nests allow formosans to survive above ground without soil contact. The nests are often located in hollow spaces, such as wall voids.

Formosan termites feed on a wider variety of cellulose than other subterranean termites. They will feed on live plants, consuming both spring and summer growth wood whereas regular

feed on live plants, consuming both spring and summer growth wood whereas regular subterranean termites feed only on spring growth. Formosan termites have also been known to chew through non-cellulose materials such as soft metals, plaster or plastic.

Formosan termites swarm from sundown to midnight, typically in May. If a pair finds adequate food and moisture, they do not require contact with the soil and will form an aerial nest.

Drywood termites do not need contact with soil and reside in sound, dry wood. These termites obtain enough moisture from the wood they digest. Drywood termites create a dry fecal pellet that can be used as an identifying characteristic. Pellets are six-sided, barrel-shaped and are often eliminated from the colony through kick out holes. Drywood termites also differ from subterranean termites by having smaller colonies (around 1,000 termites) and not building shelter tubes.

Drywood termites typically swarm during the evening hours or at night. They are attracted to bright light sources. Swarmers usually enter wood through natural cracks or adjoining pieces of wood.

Identifying Termites

Termites are identified by using winged alates (swarmers) or soldiers.



soldier head
squarish; no teeth
on mandibles



alate wings with 2 heavy
veins; formosans have
hairs on wings



soldier head oval;
mandibles often
cross

Subterranean Termite

Formosan Termite



alate wings with 3 heavy
veins; crossveins

Drywood Termite



soldier head squarish; teeth
on mandibles

Carpenter ants

Carpenter ants are commonly found around homes and sometimes even inside of homes. There are fourteen species of *Camponotus* (carpenter ants) in Texas with the most common having either a red thorax and black abdomen or all black bodies.

Carpenter ants are large, about 1/4 to 1/2 an inch for workers, with reproductives being even larger.

Carpenter ants, being omnivores, feed on plant and animal material. They like food items such as insects and other arthropods, fruit, honeydew (an excretion of aphids and other plant-feeding insects), fats, grease and meat.

Carpenter ants nest outdoors in dead wood, such as tree stumps, fences, landscaping timbers or firewood. Indoors, these ants can be found in wood siding, beams, joists, fascia boards or trim. Nests are usually constructed in either moist wood or wood that has previously damaged by water or termites. This characteristics makes carpenter ants a good indicator of rotting wood or moisture problems within a structure.

Structural damage is usually limited since carpenter ants tunnel and nest within the wood; they do not eat wood. The wood can become weakened however by the ants' excavation.

Carpenter ant excavation may be identified by the clean, smooth walls. They also tend to excavate

following the grain of softer parts of the wood. Nest locations may be discovered by searching for piles of sawdust-looking material under exit, or "kickout", holes. These sawdust piles may also contain soil or sand, uneaten insects as well as dead ants from the colony.

Carpenter ants are able to enter structures through tree branches or utility lines touching the structure, cracks and crevices around windows and doors, cracks in foundation walls, ventilation openings or heating and air conditioning ducts.

When searching for carpenter ant infestations, it is best to look in the evening since that is when the ants forage for food. Workers seen during the daytime are scouts in search of suitable food sources. Perform a thorough inspection, inside and outside, to identify possible colony areas.

Tips 'n' Tricks for Carpenter Ants

- ♦ replace wood that is water damaged & repair plumbing leaks
- ♦ prune trees & shrubs that touch or overhang the home
- ♦ remove wood debris or firewood that is near the home
- ♦ provide good ventilation under the home & in the attic
- ♦ keep exposed wood in good condition

For more information on these or other pests,
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