

Pest Control Information – Ants

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Description

There are two species of ant commonly encountered in the UK:

- The Garden Ant
- The Pharaoh's Ant

The Garden Ant has a black segmented body. The workers are 5mm in length and the queen is 15mm long and brown in colour. Their nests are found in soil, lawns and close to buildings.

The Pharaoh's Ant, which is of tropical origin, is a smaller species; the workers are only 2mm long, the queen 5mm long and both are yellow in colour.

Distribution

The Garden Ant is found throughout Britain and will nest in gardens and around buildings, often entering premises in search of food. The Pharaoh's Ant, in contrast, requires a very warm environment and has adapted itself to life in large heated buildings such as hospitals, hotels and flats.

Significance

The Garden Ant is a nuisance because of its foraging habit but it does not carry germs or spread disease. Garden Ants are attracted to sugary food; the presence of ants in food, although unpleasant, does not, in itself, constitute a health risk. Pharaoh's Ants are of greater significance as they carry harmful germs which they pick up when feeding on decomposing food, faecal matter and when coming into contact with drains.

Life Cycle

Garden Ants mate in flight when winged males and females swarm between mid-July and mid-September. After mating the male dies and the female loses her wings and buries herself in the soil

over the winter. In late spring the female lays eggs which hatch into white larvae in 3-4 weeks. The larvae are fed by the queen and when fully grown pupate. The worker ants which emerge from the pupae feed new larvae and the queen. The life cycle is complete in two months and in favourable conditions the nest may persist for several years.

In contrast the Pharaoh's Ant develops several colonies within each nest with many queens. As the old nest becomes overcrowded new colonies are formed by eggs and larvae carried by adults and worked.

The life cycle is the same as that of the Garden Ant but the Pharaoh's Ant, which favours heated buildings, is not affected by seasonal changes. The ants' ability to form many colonies makes them difficult to control.

Control

There are several measures that you can take to control Garden Ants:

- Identify and destroy the nest using boiling water or a proprietary insecticidal dust or spray, used around the nest and openings in buildings.
- If the nest is not accessible there is a gel or an enclosed ant bait station available.
- Ensure that sugary foods are kept in sealed containers and all food spillages are cleared up.

An infestation of Pharaoh's Ants must be professionally treated. Pest Control Officers will determine the extent of the infestation and carry out the specific treatment required to control them. Re-treatment will be required to control them on three to four occasions to ensure that all the ants have been eradicated.