

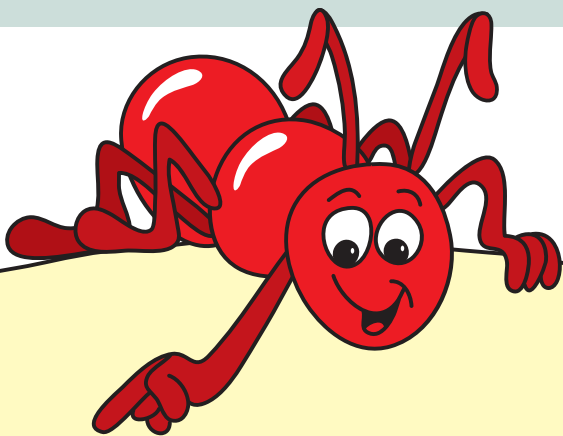


MIDWEST PESTICIDE  
ACTION CENTER

# ANTS: INDOOR AND OUTDOOR

## A FACTSHEET FROM MIDWEST PESTICIDE ACTION CENTER

It is important to understand the difference between a 'pest' and a 'guest' when managing ant infestations. To help you determine whether ants are pests or guests, consider the size of your ant infestation. Remember, a few ants 'here and there' do not necessarily mean that you have a serious pest problem. Eliminating ants can be a long and difficult process. Therefore, instead of attempting to entirely get rid of ants, concentrate your efforts on bringing ant populations down to a number that is right for you.



### IDENTIFICATION

Some of the most common types of ants found around Illinois homes are carpenter ants, odorous house ants and pavement ants. An easy way to tell the difference between carpenter ants and household ants is by their size – carpenter ants are much larger than household ants. Termites also look similar to ants but have straight antennae, thick waists and wings with veins; whereas, ants have elbowed antennae, thin waists and clear wings. It is important to correctly identify these insects because termites and carpenter ants can cause structural damage to homes.

### PREVENTION

Integrated Pest Management (IPM) is a proven method of pest management that controls pests by eliminating their food, shelter and water. This approach is practical, cost-effective and least harmful to humans, pets and the environment.

- Cut shrubs and trees at least 18" away from the house.
- Move leaves, mulch and tree branches away from the home's foundation.
- Caulk, screen and weather strip all entry points such as doors, windows and walls.
- Store garbage in tightly sealed containers, place liners/trash bags inside trash cans and dispose of garbage regularly.
- Limit eating to dining areas.
- Rinse leftover dishes that sit in the sink.
- Keep countertops, floors and all surfaces clean.
- Store sugar, grain and pet food in tightly sealed containers. Note: Screw top jars are not effective pest proof containers because ants can travel through their grooves.
- Store food on shelving that is at least 2" off the floor.

## CONTROL

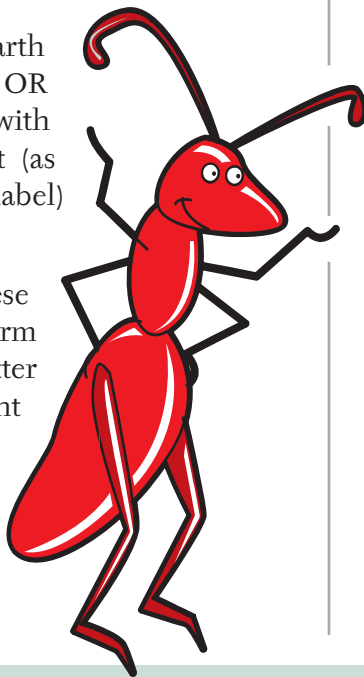
If you have an ant problem, investigate where the ants are nesting. Ant nests can be inside logs, around tree trunks, behind walls, under floors and near other such hidden locations. Once you locate the nest, you will need to manage the ant colony by taking some of the following steps:



### Outdoor Ants

- Using a shovel, dig up ant nests and move them to distant corners of your yard. This is an effective treatment because ants rarely travel great distances.
- Pour boiling soapy water on ant nests. Wait until nighttime – when the ants have returned from their daytime travels – and treat for 3 consecutive days.
- Scatter corn starch around ant nests because ants will eat the corn starch, swell and then die.
- Plant repellent plants such as catnip, pennyroyal, peppermint, sage, and spearmint.
- Spread cedar mulch around landscaped areas; it is a natural repellent.
- Sprinkle diatomaceous earth around ant nests/mounds OR mix diatomaceous earth with water and mild detergent (as indicated on the product label) and saturate the nest.\*

Avoid spray pesticides. These types of treatments can harm beneficial insects and scatter ant nests, creating more ant colonies.



### Indoor Ants

- Determine where indoor ants are entering the home by observing their ant trails. Seal these entry points.
- Spray soapy water or 1:1 vinegar and water solution. These sprays not only kill individual ants, they also wash away the chemical trails that lead ants from their nest to your home.
- Vacuum the ants along with a small amount of corn starch or talcum powder. This combination will kill the ants once they are trapped inside the vacuum bag.
- Do not allow pet food to remain in pet bowls overnight.
- Place sticky traps and glue boards around troublesome ant areas in order to monitor existing ant infestations. Be sure to also set these traps in areas where ants have been found in the past; these traps will provide early warning signs of re-occurring ant infestations.
- Place ant gels and baits in areas of high ant activity. Use baits in tamper resistant containers whenever possible.\*
- Use boric acid or diatomaceous earth in areas of high ant activity and then seal these areas with caulk.\*

**\*Caution\*:** Keep gels, baits, boric acid and diatomaceous earth out of the reach of children and animals during both indoor and outdoor applications.

If you are unable to control an ant infestation independently, please contact a pest control professional that uses Integrated Pest Management. Always follow the application and mixing instructions provided on product labels and packaging. Even least-toxic products can be harmful if used incorrectly.

Midwest Pesticide Action Center is dedicated to reducing the health risks and environmental impacts of pesticides and promoting safer alternatives.

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