

Argentine Ants

Note: DPIPW has also published fact sheets on

Pest ants

How to identify pest ants

Ants – general information



Picture courtesy of Pests and Diseases Image Library (PaDIL)

Argentine ants (*Linepithema humile*) are about 3 mm long and dark brown (not black or pale brown). These ants do not have a typical ant smell when crushed, and march in trails several ants wide.

Argentine ant is not a native species but was accidentally introduced to Tasmania in the 1970s. It has since become an annoying pest of households in the larger towns. Argentine ant is especially troublesome in food shops, warehouses and processing factories.

Please note that Argentine Ant is no longer a notifiable pest.

Biology

Argentine ant nests are made in soil (especially gardens and pot plants) or sometimes in rubbish heaps, tree holes, bird nests or under objects on the ground. The nests are only 3 cm deep during the warmer months, but these increase to about 15 cm deep in winter. The nest is usually located in moist places and close to a food source. Nests are nearly always located outside the house.

Like most ants, Argentine ants have castes - workers, queens, and winged adults. An Argentine ant nest

may consist of a few hundred to several thousand workers and from one to over a hundred queens. Workers are very aggressive to other ants, but are friendly towards other Argentine ant colonies.

New queens leave the nest during the warmer months and walk along trails to find new nest sites. This contrasts with many other ant species that fly to new nest sites. Because of their walk-dispersal and lack of inter-colony rivalry, Argentine ants can build massive maze-like colonies spanning hundreds of metres.

Feeding

Although sweet foods are preferred, Argentine ants will feed on almost every type of food. Meat, eggs, oils and fats are all foodstuffs known to be used by Argentine ants.

Argentine ants love sweet foods and sometimes appear to go to great lengths to get them. Some are known to squeeze down the spiral of screw-top jars to reach their tasty, sweet contents! In the garden, Argentine ants will protect honeydew-producing insects (eg, scale and aphids), receiving their sweet excrement in return. If you look closely at an aphid in your garden, you may see them producing tiny droplets of their sweet faeces, and maybe even an ant feeding from it. Some native species, as well as Argentine ants, feed in this way.

Control

Argentine ants are a persistent pest and are very difficult to control. As such, some form of chemical control is likely to be needed. However, hygiene and exclusion are also important components of Argentine ant management. Patience and persistence is required, whichever combination of methods is used. Community effort may be necessary in treating extensive nest systems.

Argentine ants usually nest outside in soil and often have multiple nests. Nests will need to be destroyed either by baiting or direct treatment. To locate nests, watch and follow foraging workers along ant trails. They may disappear in holes in the wall but possibly reappear outside nearby.

Chemical control

Use registered baits, sprays or powder as directed on the label. There is a range of products with different active ingredients and formulations registered for Argentine ant control. Consult with a gardening or hardware retailer about which product is suitable for your particular situation. Pest controllers can implement a pest control program.

Baiting with a registered ant bait containing boron may help to control your Argentine ant problem indoors. Read and follow the instructions on the label taking particular note of use around food.

Important note on chemical use: Agricultural chemicals, including insecticides, are not to be used for any purpose or in any manner contrary to the label unless authorised under appropriate legislation. Before using a chemical, read and adhere to the instructions for use on the label. For information on registered chemicals and current off-label permits, visit the [APVMA website](#) and click on 'Search registered chemical products (PUBCRIS)'.

Tips for baiting

- Set up baiting stations near established ant trails.
- Restrict access to all other food sources except for baiting stations.
- Prebait with honey until ants have established trails to your baiting areas.
- Do not disturb trails.
- Multiple baiting stations may be required as there may be multiple nests.
- Be patient and persistent, change/refresh baits regularly.
- If possible, avoid other controls (such as spraying) while baiting.

Tips for spraying or dusting

- Monitor the situation outdoors and control if and when necessary, especially as the weather gets warmer in spring.
- Ensure thorough coverage.
- Treat edges of concrete paths, driveways, kerbs, the edges of garden beds, and the bases of trees and shrubs.
- Treat in an unbroken band to the outer foundations of the house and the property boundary fences.
- Treat potted plants and garbage bins and their surrounds. Indoor plants can be a continuing source of infestation after outside areas are treated.
- Pull back grass from foundation walls, sidewalks and driveways before treating because the ants will trail beneath the grass-line.
- Centrally heated houses may remain infested in winter. Treat skirting boards, bases of cupboards, refrigerators, legs of tables, window sills and any other area ants forage along. Check indoor plants for nests.

Hygiene and exclusion

Remove all sources of food for the ants:

- Dispose of rubbish promptly.
- Keep jars sealed and clean (eg wash sides of honey/jam jars).
- Keep bench tops clean.
- Use ant proof pet dishes (they have a moat to fill with water).
- Reducing moisture build-up around the house to make nesting conditions less attractive.
- Seal cracks and crevices in the house.
- Prune branches that are in contact with the house (ants will walk on them into the house).
- Prune or remove plants infested with scale or aphids.

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