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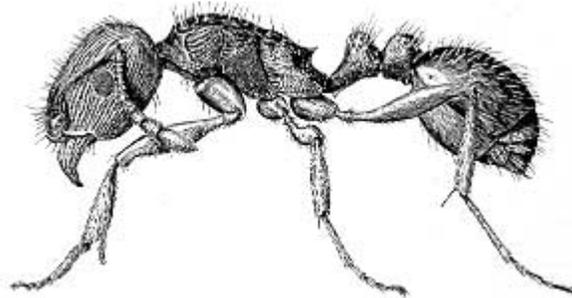
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PAVEMENT ANTS (IDENTIFICATION, BIOLOGY, AND CONTROL) - Pest Control - Environmental Health & Safety ([PRINT](#))



Pavement Ant: *Tetramorium caespitum*



Pavement ants are one of the most common indoor pests found in New England. When these small brown or brownish-black ants invade buildings, they often construct their nests under the foundation. These ants originated in Europe and were introduced into the United States a couple of hundred years ago. They are now widespread and occur in all 50 states. Pavement ants become a nuisance when they enter homes in search of food. Food can be termites, other insects, sugar or protein based ingredients. These ants become a pest when they are found wandering around the inside of the house looking for sweets.

Interesting Pavement Ant Facts

- Neighboring ant colonies may have large battles on the sidewalk in the spring, with hundreds of ants left to die on the battlefield.
- Pavement ants can have as many as 10,000 workers in a single nest.
- Pavement ants use a chemical trail to recruit nestmates to a food source.

Identification

It is important to identify your ants. Collect a few specimens on scotch tape or in vials and send them (dead) in an envelope to your local university or extension office for identification. Worker pavement ants are uniformly small, about 3mm long. They are dark brown to black in color with a shiny gaster. There are striations on the head and dorsal surface of their thorax and their 12-segmented antennae end in a 3-segmented club. Foraging ants are usually active on the floor and along the edge of the walls near door frames. During warmer days a number of winged male and female ants may swarm inside and they are usually trapped near a window as they try to escape towards the sun.

Biology

Pavement ants in nature occur primarily in open meadows under rocks and other debris. In more urban settings, pavement ants nest under sidewalks, under building foundations and under patios. There is normally a single queen although larger colonies may have additional queens. The workers live for several years and the largest colonies can exceed 10,000 workers.

These ants prey on subterranean termites, insects in the soil, plant juices, and a wide assortment of sweet and protein containing foods. Occasionally they are a nuisance if they build nest openings between bricks of patios or other sensitive areas. Pavement ants are highly attracted to peanut butter based baits.

Pavement ants forage predominately at night but during early spring and summer they will also forage during the day. Pavement ants have a sting although it is too weak to damage human skin. These ants lay a chemical trail from the food source back to the nest and it is common to see a trail of ants inside a home.

Control

NEST LOCATION

The single most important task is to locate the pavement ant nest. Worker ants must leave the nest on a regular basis (they are most active at night during the summer) and search nearby areas for food. You can search the inside perimeter of the house looking for ants on their return trip to the nest. Follow a few workers patiently and you will find that all ants return to the same location. In a few cases there may be more than one nest in a building. Since pavement ants nest below rocks and under sidewalks, they usually are found in areas with elevated moisture levels. Outside, nests occur under stones in meadows and in other open areas.

If you are having trouble locating the nest, you might try the following steps:

- 1) Start from areas of high activity and follow ants back to the nest. Returning ants take a more direct route than ants searching for food and their abdomens are often expanded with liquid food.
- 2) Look for small piles of soil kicked out of their nest entrance. This is often near door jams and in areas of foundation cracks.
- 3) Put out a sweet food source such as dilute honey or jam and follow ants from your bait back to their nest.

CONTROL MEASURES THAT YOU CAN DO YOURSELF

Once the nest has been located, the next step is to eliminate the ants inside. First you may want to try several measures yourself.

- 1) If you find wood in direct contact with the soil, grade the soil away from the house so that moisture does not collect against the wood.
- 2) Check gutters for accumulated leaves and debris that might be plugging the down spout. Check the down spout to make sure that water is directed away from the house at the base.
- 3) Once the exact location of the nest is known, most colonies can be eliminated with bait labeled for ant control. Be aware that some containerized baits in stores do not control pavement ants. Baits are very effective when fresh and properly placed, and are generally preferable to contact insecticides in most situations. If liquid or soft baits are placed too close to the nest entrance, they may be covered with soil rather than consumed by ants.
- 4) If only the general location of a nest is known, then the nest can still be eliminated by the use of baits. Look for baits containing toxicants that are slow acting and allow time for the bait to be spread throughout the colony and especially to the queen.

PROFESSIONAL PEST CONTROL SERVICES

If you prefer to use a pest control vendor, then the following guidelines should help you choose a reputable firm.

- 1) Obtain two or more estimates for control. The company you choose should have located the nest or probable nest site before treatment. See if both companies agree on the same nest location.
- 2) Is safety measures part of the pest control service? Are you provided with a material safety data sheet that indicates hazards and are you given a fact sheet on pavement ants?
- 3) If the nest is successfully eliminated and the moisture problem corrected, there is little concern that you will need additional service such as a yearly or monthly service. Be wary of signing a contract that requires additional costs and service. Ask for a guarantee that the nest will be eliminated or find a different pest control firm.