

Information About Carpenter Ants



What is a Carpenter Ant?

Nesting in damp locations, carpenter ants prefer to excavate wood that has been damaged by water. From their nests in the beams, floors or walls, they scavenge the house for food crumbs and insects. Carpenter ants may occur in several colors, although the most important species are black.

One of the largest members of the ant family, carpenter ants take their name from their habit of chewing passageways (called "galleries") inside wood. They live in these galleries and make excursions, most often at night, to hunt for food and water. These ants often set up satellite colonies inside homes from parent colonies located outside in a tree or landscape timber.

Where You'll Find Carpenter Ants

Carpenter ants love damp climates and moist areas – damp wood, any dark void, a few morsels of food. Places that get a lot of rain are especially susceptible. So are homes built in heavily wooded areas or in low, shady places where the ground stays damp. In your home, you're likely to find carpenter ants nesting around a sink in the kitchen or bathroom. Maybe even around plumbing leaks, clogged gutters and downspouts.

A clean house is no guarantee. When carpenter ants move in, the first thing they do is look for food. Unlike termites, carpenter ants do not eat wood. They search for syrup, honey, jelly, meat, fruit, grease, fat, and other domestic foods. If these favorites are not available in your home, the ants will feed on dead or living insects or any other type of organic matter.

To construct their galleries, carpenter ants tear bits of wood and place them outside the nest. These sawdust-looking piles, called frass, may be the first visible sign that carpenter ants are present. Left unchecked for a period of time, these galleries can become quite large. While the primary nest is found in damp wood, carpenter ants establish many satellite colonies. This makes them difficult to control, especially since colonies may be found in any dark void- hollow curtain rods, hollow-core doors, ceilings, dead wall space, etc.

Carpenter ants mature in about two months and immediately start enlarging the nest. First year broods are small, with only 10 to 20 workers. But in a few years, when the colony has thousands of workers, small tunnels become major expressways connecting many hidden galleries. You may not be aware that a strong colony is firmly entrenched in your home until it is too late.

Telltale Signs of Carpenter Ants

- ❑ Trails of workers around the kitchen, pantry, and other areas where food is stored
- ❑ Sawdust-like material that workers kick out of their nests during excavation

Listen for ant sounds in the quiet of the night. When the ants are chewing, or simply moving around in the nest, they make a sound like rustling cellophane.

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If you see or hear any of these signs, you may have carpenter ants.

You need to have a well-constructed plan for dealing with carpenter ants. If you suspect carpenter ants have invaded your home, it's best to seek immediate treatment. Professionals make a thorough inspection of your home, inside and out. Depending on your home's construction and the location of the main nest and satellite colonies, these professionals will use a variety of methods to treat the problem.

Reinfestation by Carpenter Ants

Reinfestation by carpenter ants is a constant threat. Only regular inspections and preventive service can keep them out.

Nesting Sites of Carpenter Ants

- Dead limbs of living trees
- Under attic insulation
- Hollow trees
- Roofs
- Interior wall voids
- Hollow core doors
- Under exterior siding
- Ceilings
- Supports in crawl space
- Exterior wall voids
- Stumps
- Wood pile
- Sill plates
- Between insulation and subfloors
- Roots of dead trees

Points of Entry for Carpenter Ants

- Clogged drains and gutters
- Fencing next to home
- Wiring entrances
- Edges of fireplace brick
- Window casings
- Door frames
- Vines and plants touching home
- Edges of siding
- Mulch around home
- Crawl space vent
- Plumbing
- Wood in contact with soil

Certain parts of a house are more likely to be infested by carpenter ants.

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Facts

- ❑ Are typically large ants up to 5/8-inch long; color varies from black, brown & black, red and black, to light brown depending on the species. The two most common pest species are black in color.
- ❑ Most common pest ant seen in homes throughout the northern United States from the east to west coast.
- ❑ The main colony must have a constant source of moisture to survive so it is usually located in dead wood outside, e.g., dead limbs, tree holes, stumps, landscape timbers, etc. Indoors, a main colony will have to be associated with a water leak or an overly wet, poorly ventilated crawlspace or attic.
- ❑ The main colony may establish satellite colonies that are the primary source of ant activity inside homes. These satellite colonies may be located in any suitable void, under attic insulation, etc. Colonies have even been found inside hollow doors, curtain rods, shower rods, and once inside an alarm clock!
- ❑ These ants set up trunk trails between the main colony to satellite colonies and between satellite colonies. Foraging ants can most easily be seen along these trunk trails at night when the ants are most active. Sometimes, the trunk trails occur beneath the ground following tree roots.
- ❑ Since carpenter ants may forage as far as 200 yards or further, the main colony may be located on a neighboring property.
- ❑ Carpenter ants feed on a wide variety of foods, especially other insects. The favored food of adults is the sweet honeydew produced by plant-feeding insects, such as aphids, scales, and mealy bugs.
- ❑ In the spring, mature colonies produce winged reproductives, called swarmers, that fly out to start new colonies. These swarms often occur from satellite colonies within homes so a homeowner may see large flying ants in their home at night.
- ❑ Carpenter ant queens are about 3/4-inch in length while the males are smaller at 1/2-inch. The color varies depending on the species.
- ❑ Carpenter ants can be very difficult to control so most homeowners employ the services of a professional company.