

Q: Will I ever get rid of ants?

A: You cannot eliminate all ants outdoors, especially Argentine ants, although you can reduce their numbers. Focus your management strategy on keeping ants out of buildings and out of trees. Keeping ants out of buildings is a realistic goal.

Q: How do I know what ant I have?

A: Most likely you have the Argentine ant, the most common ant problem in California. See the *Key to Identifying Common Household Ants* or the *Ant Pest Note* on the UC IPM Web Site for more information on ant identification.

Q: Which ants bite?

A: Most ant species rarely bite; stinging is more common.

- The velvety tree ant is an aggressive biter.
- Native fire ants and harvester ants, primarily outdoor species, are the most common stinging ants in California. The red imported fire ant is an aggressive stinging ant found in some southern California counties.

Q: Why is it important to know what ant species I have?

A: Different ant species have varying food preferences and nesting locations, and respond to management practices differently. Correct identification is important for making appropriate management decisions.

Q: When are ants beneficial?

A: Ants travel through soil and help loosen it, allowing water, air, and nutrients to flow freely through it. They also decompose dead plant and animal matter and can even feed on other insects. Ants feed on termites and other pests in the garden.

Q: Do birds or beneficial insects feed on ants?

A: Some birds or spiders may feed on ants, but not enough to keep ants under control. The most important natural enemies of ants are other ant species.

Q: If I control termites, will the ants go away?

A: No, ants are just as prevalent in termite-free homes as in homes with termites. Although ants can feed on termites, they are attracted to many other things in the home and outside, such as sweets, grease, fats, proteins, and seeds, which will keep them around.

Q: How do I find the ant nest? What do I do when I find it?

A: Most California ants nest outdoors.

- When you spot an ant trail, try to follow it back as far as you can. It may be difficult to locate a nest if ants are coming indoors, but you may be able to follow the trail to a nest in a nearby outdoor planter, among woodpiles, debris or at the base of trees.
- Look for small piles of soil with ants coming in and out.
- If you do find a nest, place baits near nest openings.

Q: Why do I have ants feeding on protein-type foods all year round?

A: In general, Argentine ants prefer protein-based foods during the spring. But there are no absolutes. There are variations in feeding preferences, and you may see ants feeding on a wide variety of food all year.

Q: How do I get rid of the ants invading my home?

A: First you need to find out what the ants are attracted to and remove the food source.

- Clean up trails with soapy water.
- Figure out how ants are coming indoors and caulk the openings.
- Put baits out at entry points and apply gel bait to avoid future invasions.

Q: How do I get rid of ants in potted plants?

A: Remove the pots from the building,

- Place the pots for 20 minutes or more in a solution of insecticidal soap and water at a rate of one to two tablespoons of insecticidal soap per quart of water.
- Submerge so the surface of the soil is just covered by the water-soap solution.

Q: Why are the ants crawling up my fruit tree?

A: When numerous ants are found on plants, they are probably attracted to the sweet honeydew deposited on the plants by honeydew-producing insects such as aphids or soft scales. Ants protect honeydew-producing insects from their natural enemies. As these insects increase and produce honeydew, they are supplying a food source for ants, which allows the ant colony to grow. As ants increase, they are more likely to invade adjacent buildings. Ants may also be attracted up into trees or shrubs by ripening or rotten sweet fruit or floral nectar.

- These ants can be kept out by banding tree trunks with sticky substances.
- Trim branches to keep them from touching structures or plants so that ants are forced to climb up the trunk to reach the foliage.
- Manage honeydew producers in trees.

Q: What sticky barrier can I apply around tree trunks?

A: You can use a material such as Tanglefoot or Stickem.

- The bark of some trees is sensitive to the sticky material. For these trees, first wrap the trunk with a collar of fabric tree wrap, heavy paper, or masking tape.
- Coat the wrap with a narrow band of the sticky material.
- You only need to apply Tanglefoot or trim branches of trees when honeydew producers are present.

Q: Are ants in the soil damaging my plants? Last year the ants killed my vegetables, how can I prevent that this year?

A: Ants do not directly damage plants except when they are feeding on sweet fruit or nuts. However, ants do protect honeydew-producing insects, which can be damaging (although rarely kill plants). Ants are attracted to the sweet honeydew produced by insects such as aphids or soft scales. Manage honeydew producers to avoid the high numbers of ants crawling up plants. Ants may also be attracted to the nectar of some sweet flowers.

Q: How do I know which ant bait to use?

A: See the Ant Pest Note for a list of bait products.

- Give ants a choice by using various bait products. Try different active ingredients, and use both sugar and protein-based baits.
- Monitor baits to make sure ants are feeding on them. If there is no activity, switch to a different bait.
- Make sure that other nearby attractive food is removed from the area.

Q: Is boric acid toxic in the vegetable garden?

A: Boric acid is a low-toxicity material and is safe to use in the garden, but it should be used with care.

- Use in bait stations or prepackaged baits.
- Keep away from children and pets.
- Many boric acid products are organically acceptable.

**Q: How long does it take for baits to work and how do I know if the bait is effective?
If the bait isn't working, what else can I use?**

A: It can take up to a week or more before you see results from baits.

- The baits need to be slow acting so that they don't kill the ants before they can bring the bait back to the colony. This really varies depending on the active ingredient. For example, baits with fipronil work faster than baits with boric acid.
- It is important to monitor the bait stations. You need to make sure ants are actually feeding on the baits you put out. If they aren't feeding on them, make sure that all other nearby attractive food is removed. If it is, you may need to switch to another active ingredient, or use a couple of different baits so ants can choose.
- Remember that you will not be able to eliminate all ants in a colony, but the problem should go away with persistence.
- Remember that baits alone will not solve a difficult ant problem. You will need to employ an integrated program that includes cultural practices as well as baits.

Q: How do I apply granular bait?

A: Use granular baits in reusable bait stations to keep them away from children and pets.

[Note: Liquid baits are more effective against Argentine ants than granular baits.]

- Bait stations also prevent materials from being washed into storm drains.
- In reusable stations, it is easier to see if baits are being fed on and baits are protected from rain or irrigation.

Q: Where can I find reusable bait stations and liquid boric acid bait?

A: The KM AntPro bait dispenser and Gourmet Liquid Ant Bait are difficult to find in retail stores in California. The best way to purchase them is on the Internet.

Some sources include:

- <http://www.epestsupply.com/antpro.htm>
- <http://www.pestproducts.com/antpro.htm>
- <http://www.domyownpestcontrol.com>
- <http://www.rinconvitova.com>

Q: Do I have to find the ant nest for effective use of ant bait?

A: No.

- Place baits where you know ants will find them.
- Place baits along ant trails and near places where they are entering buildings.

Q: Is there a particular time of year best to put out ant baits?

A: Use baits only when there is an ant problem.

- You are more likely to see large invasions of ants when the weather changes such as in the spring and fall.
- Place baits outdoors when you see a few ants entering buildings searching for food. This way you may be able to keep large trails of ants from coming indoors.
- Be sure to combine the use of baits with exclusionary methods such as caulking up entryways and cleaning up food sources.

Q: Are ant baits alone OK or should I mix and match chemical treatments?

A: Do not use any insecticide sprays while you are using baits. They disrupt the baiting process and are not needed.

- You can use more than one bait product at a time. Give ants a choice by setting out both protein and sugar baits in both liquid and solid forms.
- Always combine baiting with sanitation and exclusion.
- Make sure other attractive food sources are removed and seal entryways.

Q: Can you just leave the ants alone, or are you asking for future infestations in the house if they are currently in the garden?

A: You are never going to eliminate all ants outdoors. If they are not causing any problems, you can leave them alone.

- Prevent ants from coming indoors by removing attractive food sources.
- Exclude them by sealing entryways with caulk.
- Keep ant populations in the garden down by eliminating food sources such as garbage, rotting fruit and insect honeydew.

Q: Does diatomaceous earth work to control ants?

A: Diatomaceous earth is an inert dust combined with absorptive powders that destroys ants by absorbing their protective outer body cover, causing them to dry out, or desiccate.

- It is readily available in retail stores.
- Dusts are useful only in areas such as wall voids where they can be protected from moisture because they lose their effectiveness if they get wet. Since most California ants are not nesting in wall voids, dusts have limited usefulness.
- Dusts can also cause serious lung irritation if inhaled.

Q: What about peppermint oil or orange oil?

A: Peppermint oil, orange oil, and other plant-based oils can be applied to clean up ant trails and remove the ant's scent trail, but their odor can be offensive. These oils provide only short-term control. Alternatively, some soap products such as window cleaners or ammonia can kill ants on contact but leave no residual toxicity.

Q: Why do ants come in even when my house is clean?

A: Ants often move indoors when outdoor conditions change, such as food sources become unavailable or if the weather changes.

- They come in seeking food and water, warmth and shelter, or a refuge from dry, hot weather or flooded conditions.
- Be prepared for ant invasions by sealing entryways and cleaning up food sources before the weather changes.

Q: Where can I find information about pesticide safety?

A: National Pesticide Information Center: <http://npic.orst.edu/gen.htm>

Refer to the *Ant Pest Note* on the UC IPM Web site for more information.
<http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn7411.html>