

Ants



Common Black Ant / Garden Ant

Advice to Householders

Distribution and Habitat

The common black or garden ant occurs with great frequency throughout the UK, and frequently close to and in association with man's dwellings.

Biology

The formation of a new social colony of black ants starts with a mated winged female ant digging into the earth to produce a small cell. She lays a variable, but eventually large, number of white eggs, which hatch after 3 - 4 weeks into white, legless grubs.

The female tends these, feeding them on nourishing secretions from her salivary glands.

After about three weeks the larvae are mature and pupate within the cell. It usually takes less than two weeks for the adult ants to emerge from the pupae, and this first generation will be entirely composed of workers.

Once this occurs, these ants can now tend both the queen and subsequent larvae by bringing quite a range of food materials into the nest. They will collect nectar and seeds from flowers, small dead insects and the sugary secretions produced by greenfly and blackfly during the ants 'farming activities'.

The worker ants also extend and enlarge the nest, clean out much of the excreta and inedible rubbish.

They actively protect the queen, larvae (grubs), pupae and eggs, moving them to safety if need be.

Some time in the late winter, winged and sexually mature males and large females will be produced from the nest and will emerge in large numbers over a short time period. This 'swarming' will often occur with many nests at the same time, and frequently in the afternoons.

The winged ants fly away, mating on the wing, and eventually settle exhausted. The males usually die quickly and only a small proportion the mated females survive to found new colonies.

Normally only one female will found each colony, but sometimes new colonies are formed in close proximity.

Ants will nest in a whole variety of suitable sites, and mostly these are of no significance to man. However, sandy soil (in general) and the sand used to form the base of paved garden paths and in the foundations of houses, attracts local ants and nests may well be formed in these areas. Again little trouble is caused unless the foraging worker ants invade the buildings. This is highly likely if the nest has been constructed beneath the floor of the house, and ants are adept at finding even the smallest settlement and other cracks in the structure; other ants are then 'led' into the building.

Importance

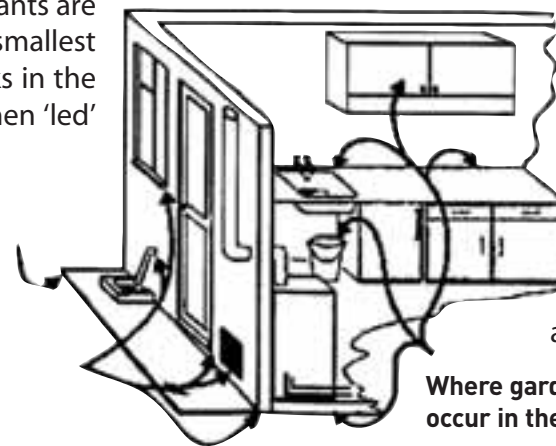
Black ants have a wide spectrum of acceptable foods, but they are particularly attracted by sweet substances. One successful foraging worker is able to communicate the information to her co-workers, with the inevitable result of vast numbers of worker ants invading and incidentally contaminating suitable human foods.

Although not inherently 'dirty' insects, they must sometimes walk across unsavoury and unclean areas during their foraging exercises, and this leads to any invading houses being considered unacceptable in most circumstances.

Unlike the tropical ants which infest hospitals and other institutions, the black ant is not known to transmit serious disease organisms.

Control

Control measures are generally only required where ants are penetrating, or on occasion living in, building structures. In cases of penetration the first approach should be to seal obvious faults in the structure using mortar / cement or mastic, as appropriate (see illustration). It is usually best initially to support such proofing measures by the application of a residual insecticide band to likely access area.



Where garden ants can enter and occur in the domestic kitchen.

A dust formulation is particularly useful if blown into any spaces harbouring colonies. It may on occasion be possible to treat the area of outdoor nests, when found, with insecticide, if this is deemed necessary. This may, however, simply encourage any survivors of the colony to move to another nest site.

Although a number of bait formulations are cleared for use against garden ants, they are often of limited effectiveness. However, on the occasions when some 'delayed action' active ingredient is transported to the nest a decline in nest growth will result. The two main active ingredients used in baits are sodium tetraborate (one of the salts of boric acid) and trichlorphon (an organophosphorus compound).

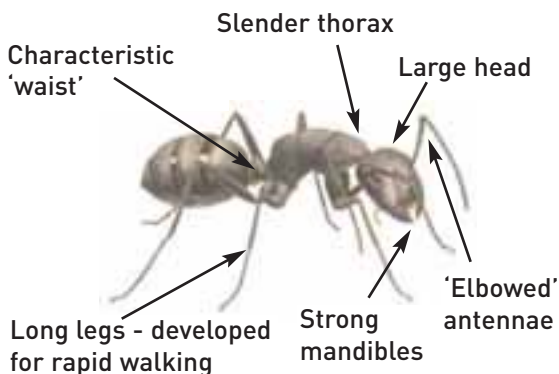
Finally, many 'household' insecticide aerosols are cleared for use against crawling insects. Their use is likely to offer only short-term relief, in view of their relatively low dose of active ingredient likely to be applied, and if a householder is involved in 'DIY' control it would be better to use one of the bendiocarb dust 'puffer packs' (0.5%) currently cleared for use in and around the home. As with all pesticides, care should be taken to protect pets.

Where do I get further information?

For further information on the Pest Control Service of East Lindsey District Council, please contact:

The Pest Control Section on **(01507) 601111**, or write to:

**The Pest Control Section
East Lindsey District Council
Tedder Hall,
Manby Park,
Louth,
Lincolnshire,
LN 11 8UP**



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