



# CONTROLLING **ANTS** IN YOUR HOUSE

**T**here are several species of small ants that are frequent invaders in Idaho homes. Although they can be pests, ants provide an important ecological cleansing and fertilization service. They kill and eat many pest insects, aerate the soil, and recycle dead animal and vegetable material. Because of these beneficial aspects, it is undesirable (and probably downright impossible) to eliminate ants from their outside habitat. The best approach to ant management is to try to keep them outdoors.

## DETECTION

Look for individual “scouts” or long lines of ants in or around the house near food or water. Carpenter ants are distinguished from other ants by size. Carpenter ants are 1/4” or larger, and are considered as structural destroying pests. Because these require different management techniques from those listed below, you may want to contact a professional pest control operator for assistance.

## LESS-TOXIC CONTROLS

### Inside Your Home

- **Kill the scouts** so they can’t call in the hordes when they find a tasty tidbit. A good technique for this is to vacuum them; the dust in the bag will desiccate them.

- **Use ant baits** because they use a minimum of insecticide and confine it to a very small area (see “Tips for Using Ant Baits”).
- **Use insecticidal dusts** such as diatomaceous earth (DE) in wall voids and cracks before they are sealed. Follow label instructions for application.
- **After declines** in the ant population is noticed, clean up all food sources and fix leaky water systems. Note - If this is done prior to control actions it may disperse the pest ant population into a larger area.

### Outside Your Home

- **Use sticky barriers** around the trunk of a tree or bush to prevent ants from protecting aphids and other “honeydew”- producing insects. Prune any branches that touch walls, fences, utility wires or the ground so ants cannot find alternate routes onto the plant.
- **Ant Baits.** If you can find the spot outside where ants are entering the building (this is often difficult to do), place bait there; otherwise use baits only inside. Outside, rain and sprinklers can wash baits away, and you may end up attracting ants to your house. Many types of bait come in small bait stations that can be secured in out-of-the-way locations (under rocks, boards, etc.) but accessible by the ants. Follow the label directions for application.

- **Remove food** items such as dog food so they will not be in competition with the baits. Remove water sources and harborage materials once control efforts take effect.

## PREVENTION

- **Store food in containers that seal tightly** or in the refrigerator when you notice ant activity.
- **Keep things clean and dry** and fix leaking faucets and pipes (ants need food and water).
- **Caulk cracks** where ants are entering the house. Weather-strip doors and windows.

## TIPS FOR USING ANT BAITS

Ant baits contain a pesticide mixed with an attractive food substance. Ants take small quantities of bait back to their nest to share with their nest mates. In this way the entire nest can sometimes be eliminated.

- Use baits with boric acid, hydramethylnon, or fipronil, as an active ingredient.
- Keep several different baits on hand because ants may change their food preferences frequently. If the bait is not working, try another. Wait at least a day to see if they are consuming the bait.
- Use baits primarily inside (long term use outside may attract more ants to the house and rain and sprinklers may destroy or wash away bait).



Choose less-toxic pest controls for your home and garden.

- Do not spray insecticide around the bait; it will repel the ants.
- When ants are gone, remove the bait so you don't attract more ants. If the bait you are using comes enclosed in a bait station, return it to its original box to save and use again. Put the box inside a plastic bag and seal it.
- Baits may take several weeks to kill the ants. At first you may see more ants coming to the bait, but after a few days to a week you should see a significant reduction as the effects of the bait work through the nest population.
- If ant problem is persistent you may wish to seek professional assistance.



1. Find what ants are after (usually left-over food) and where they are entering the room (usually through a crack in the wall). Mark it so you can find it again. If you can't find an entry point, see Step 5.
2. Don't remove the food until after Step 3 because ants will scatter. They are easier to vacuum up in a line.
3. Clean up lines of ants with a vacuum, or spray ants with soapy water and wipe up with a sponge. Soap washes away the chemical trail ants follow.
4. Next, block entry point temporarily with a smear of petroleum jelly or a piece of tape. Use silicone caulk to permanently close cracks in walls, along moldings and baseboards, and in gaps around pipes and ducts.
5. If you can't find an entry point, clean up the ants (Step 3) to a convenient (preferably out-of-the-way) spot. Place the bait station on the line the ants had been following. Always remove the bait station when the line of ants has disappeared so you don't attract more ants into the house (see "Tips for Using Ant Baits").
6. If you observe ant swarms (large numbers of winged ants usually congregated on the south and west facing surfaces) are best controlled by vacuuming them up.

### THINGS TO AVOID AND WHY

*These considerations will reduce the potential indiscriminate use of chemical control products and therefore reduce the potential exposure of pesticide residues to humans, animals and the environment.*

- Use of pesticide products without:
  1. knowing what pest you are trying to control,
  2. consideration of alternative control options (IPM),
  3. selecting the most appropriate product for your situation, and
  4. reading and following the label directions.
- Automated aerosols and plant feeders: These devices may disperse chemicals in a way that can increase the risks of exposure to unintentional targets.
- Careless use of ground sterilants: These can leach; either use great care or alternative control methods to prevent damage to desired plants or water contamination.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The Central Contra Costa Sanitary District originally developed this Integrated Pest Management (IPM) outreach program for California. The Partners for Clean Water, with assistance from the Idaho Department of Agriculture and the University of Idaho Cooperative Extension, modified the information for Idaho.

### WATER POLLUTION

Common household pesticides (a term which includes all chemical control such as herbicides, insecticides, rodenticides, etc.) can make their way into treated wastewater and local waterways, and may be at levels that can harm sensitive aquatic life. Pesticides can also get into ground water which may be used as drinking water. Water pollution prevention agencies have teamed up with participating retail stores, and professional pest control associations to reduce the risks associated with improper pesticide use.

Use pesticides according to label directions, paying close attention to surface and ground water advisories. Dispose of unwanted or leftover pesticides at a household hazardous waste collection facility or event; or through the Idaho State Department of Agriculture (ISDA) Pesticide Disposal Program (PDP). Clean, plastic pesticide and fertilizer containers may also be recycled through ISDA's Container Recycling Operation Program (CROP). Please call 208-465-8442 or visit: [www.agri.idaho.gov](http://www.agri.idaho.gov) for more information. For additional information on pesticide disposal, call 1-800-CLEANUP or visit: [www.1800CLEANUP.org](http://www.1800CLEANUP.org).

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

Active ingredients are listed on the front of the product. Pesticide information profiles can be found on the Oregon State University hosted webpage <http://extoxnet.orst.edu/pips>. The University of Idaho's Extension Educators, located in most counties, can often assist in local pest management questions. No endorsement of specific brand name products is intended, nor is criticism implied of similar products that are not mentioned.

For more information, contact:

#### Partners for Clean Water

[www.PartnersForCleanWater.org](http://www.PartnersForCleanWater.org)

#### Idaho State Department of Agriculture

[www.agri.state.id.us/](http://www.agri.state.id.us/)

#### University of Idaho IPM website:

[www.extension.uidaho.edu/](http://www.extension.uidaho.edu/)

#### University of Idaho Cooperative Extension

##### Master Gardeners in your area

[www.extension.uidaho.edu/idahogardens/](http://www.extension.uidaho.edu/idahogardens/)

#### Western Integrated Pest

##### Management Center

[www.wripmc.org/](http://www.wripmc.org/)

#### IPM Institute of North America

[www.ipminstitute.org/](http://www.ipminstitute.org/)

#### National Pest Management Association

[www.PestWorld.org](http://www.PestWorld.org)



[www.PartnersForCleanWater.org](http://www.PartnersForCleanWater.org)