

FACT sheet

Ants

EXODUS
PEST CONTROL

Ants

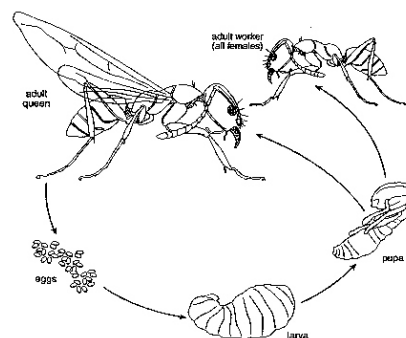
Ants are widespread throughout Australia, including Tasmania, in all terrestrial habitats. Bushland areas have numerous coexisting species. Ants live in large colonies or groups. Their home is a nest. There may be up to a million ants in a large nest. In each colony there are three types of ants: the queen, the female workers, and males. The male ants' job is to mate with queen ants so that they will be able to lay eggs. Male ants don't live very long.

There are approximately 3,000 species of ants that nest in a variety of locations in Australia.

The queen grows to be an adult, mates with a male, then spends the rest of her life laying eggs. In a colony there may be only one queen or there may be many queens, depending on the species of ant. Worker ants do all the work in the nest. They build it and clean it, gather food, look after the queen, the eggs, and the young ants. Worker ants also defend the nest.

Life cycle

Ants go through four stages: egg, larva, pupa, and adult. The larva hatches from the egg and is cared for by the worker ants. During the pupa stage the larva is in a sleep-like state, as it changes into an adult ant. All ants live in colonies which typically include a large force of workers and a single, or several queens, along with successive life-history stages, eggs, larvae and pupae; the composition may vary seasonally. The worker ants of most domestic pests forage in columns, and may co-operate in the return of larger items of booty. Adult ants imbibe liquid food, including sweet solutions, meat juices, and the blood of prey insects to maintain their day-to-day energy requirements.



Nests



Different kinds of ants build different types of nests. Some build simple mounds of dirt or sand. Others use small sticks mixed with dirt and sand to make stronger, waterproof mounds. Inside the nest there are many chambers (or rooms). The chambers are connected to each other by tunnels. Chambers are used for different things, for example as nurseries for eggs and young ants, for storing food, as resting places for the worker ants and a there's a special chamber just for the queen.

Ants communicate (talk to each other) by touching each other with their antennae. They also use chemicals called pheromones (say *ferra-moans*) to leave a trail of scent for other ants to follow.

Ants have lived on the Earth for more than 100 million years and can be found almost anywhere on the planet.

Ants are found around the home, schools, and commercial properties attracted by the food and security offered. On this page and the next are four species of ant we have to contend with on a regular basis:

Argentine ant

The introduced Argentine ant is such a pest that when it first appeared in Australia almost half a century ago, the government offered a reward to anyone who reported a nest. Today, Australia is still plagued with these tiny red ants, their latest assault being into the suburbs of Melbourne. They kill native plant seedlings and compete aggressively with native ants for food and nesting sites. They also cause havoc in households by nesting in potted plants, light sockets and wall cavities.



Black house ant

The Black House Ant, *Ochetellus* (formerly *Iridomyrmex*) *glaber*, occurs in Australia over much of the range of the White-footed House Ant and has similar behaviour. It commonly nests within the structure of buildings. *O. glaber* is adept at importing and tending aphids and other bugs on domestic pot plants. It is a little smaller and stockier than the White-footed House Ant, and more intensely black, with a sometimes subtle, but distinct, purplish blue-green iridescence. The White-footed and Black House Ants have a distinctive strong odour when crushed, but the smell is reportedly imperceptible to some noses.



"Your EXODUS Pest Control technician has a variety of products and a plan of attack to treat your specific ant situation. Listen to his professional advice and his plan to address your situation so that you have a thorough understanding of the treatment. "

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Coastal brown ant

Originally from Africa, the Coastal Brown Ant, *Pheidole megacephala*, is prominent in domestic situations in the Perth/Fremantle area; Darwin; and east coast towns, south at least to Sydney. It is considered the major ant pest in many areas. Distinctive large-headed major workers are present along with ordinary workers. The majors defend the colony, and perform special tasks, such as seed-cracking. The waist is 2-jointed, and a sting is present. This ant infests houses, stores and gardens, taking food ranging from sugar to cheese, meat and bread. Outside it tends sap-sucking bugs and interferes with gardening, cultivation and harvesting. Tropical crop trees like coffee can fall over because of soil loosening by Coastal Brown Ant nests.



White-footed house ant

The White-footed House Ant, *Technomyrmex albipes*, ranges from SE Asia to Eastern Australia and New Zealand. It is one of the three small, dolichoderine ants which are major pests in Australia. These species lack major workers; they have 1 segmented waist node and do not sting (their venom is smeared from the tip of the abdomen). All are relatively soft-bodied and easily squashed when crushed between fingers. White-footed House Ants are dull cloudy black in colour, with largely white legs. These ants can live well in gardens and domestic surrounds. They enter houses most frequently in dry periods seeking water in kitchens or bathrooms, and will eat sweet substances or meat. Indoors, nests may utilise any suitable space: wall and ceiling voids, insulation batts, even small, empty, storage containers.



Economic and health impacts of ants

Ants are mainly a nuisance pest rather than a health problem. Ants cause problems primarily when they forage in buildings for food or water and when they construct nests in buildings and gardens. When searching for food, they are attracted to a wide range of foodstuffs. They will also search indoors for water during dry periods. When desirable items are found many species will recruit fellow nest mates to help gather the food and return it to the nest. This can result in large numbers of ants appearing over a short period of time.

Ants can be a nuisance when attempts are made to establish plants through direct seeding. Workers will forage for the newly planted seeds, removing them to their nests and causing reduced germination.

Some ants build nests in walls and foundations, or indoors in potted plants, enclosed areas, and even in cavities in toilets and sinks. In almost all cases nests are limited to pre-existing cavities or spaces between objects or in rotten wood. Ants will seldom attack solid structures. Thus they generally will not cause structural damage to buildings but will take advantage of existing deterioration. A few species will occasionally attack electrical wiring and cause extensive damage.

Outdoors, nesting activity can result in excavated soil being deposited in gardens and on brickwork. In most cases this causes little property damage but some species can form large numbers of chambers close to the surface. These chambers can cause soil to become soft and uneven, causing serious problems when found in some types of pastures or crops.

Several species of ants pose serious health threats to people who are sensitive to their stings. In extreme cases hospitalisation may be required. Other species are known to carry diseases. Fortunately these cases are uncommon in Australia.

The conveyance of some diseases such as dysentery, small pox and salmonella has been recorded.

Ant Control

To keep ants out of a structure, sanitation is very important. If you have an ant infestation, all food products should be stored in containers that can be sealed. Don't leave food scraps out overnight.

Kitchens need to be kept clean with no food products under sinks or in ovens. This is especially important in commercial kitchens.

Any water leaks must be fixed to take away a water source for colonies. This is especially relevant with the dry conditions being experienced across Australia.

Your EXODUS Pest Control Technician can develop an effective control strategy utilising a number of tools at his disposal to suit your circumstance.