

FACT sheet

Termites

EXODUS
PEST CONTROL

Termites in Australia

They are commonly known as "White Ants". However, termites are not even closely related to ants. Ants have eyes, a constricted waist and dark bodies, whereas most worker and soldier termites are blind, have no constriction and are creamy in colour.

There are more than 300 species found in Australia but only about 30 could be considered to be pests of timber in service. Of these, the subterranean termites are the most significant, with about 12 species being serious pests.

The termite diet is centred around cellulose-based materials. These can include the timber used in constructing buildings, but could also include furniture, paper materials and fabrics. These termites can also damage non-cellulose materials such as polystyrene and plasterboard or the plastic coatings on electrical wiring.

Life history and habits

Termites are social insects and live in colonies containing a number of different castes. Each caste has a different form and function from the others; each is vital to the viability of the colony. In general terms the life history of all the economically important subterranean species is similar.

Alates

On a warm, humid evening large numbers of winged male and female termites, the "alates" or "primary reproductives" are released by the colony. A small number survive the flight, drop their two parts of distinctive, equal sized wings, pair off, mate, and if they can find a suitable location, start a new colony.



Termite alates



Termite Queen

Queen

As the other castes take over the running of the colony the young queen of most species becomes "physogastric" - her abdomen distends to many times its original size and she becomes an egg laying machine, laying up to 1,000 eggs a day. She is confined to her royal chamber, tended and fed by the workers and regularly fertilised by the male reproductive.

Nursery

The eggs are removed from the royal chamber and transferred to a nursery by the workers. Here the brood (the eggs and nymphs) develops into the other castes that the colony requires for development and survival: workers, soldiers and primary or secondary reproductives.



Termite eggs and nymphs



Termite soldiers and workers

Soldiers and workers

Soldiers and workers are blind and sterile termites.

The workers carry out the work for the colony and are responsible for gathering the food the colony needs. In most species the heads of the soldiers are uniquely armoured and equipped to allow them to defend the colony against attack, notably from ants.

Termite nest

Termites build a nest that contains the queen and king, the nursery and a large proportion of the soldiers and workers. Some species build a hard-shelled mound above or partly below the ground. Others build their nests in the trunk of a tree or below ground in the root crown. A nest can contain several million termites.

Termite leads

Termites are prone to dessication. All significant species that attack buildings construct a system of sealed leads that connect the nest to the food sources. Termites can move safely from the nest to the food and back, in an environment that will protect them against exposure to atmospheric conditions, predators and even pesticides.



Termite nest inside tree

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

EXODUS PEST CONTROL

Coptotermes

Coptotermes acinaciformis is found throughout mainland Australia and causes more damage to property than any other species. It is aggressive in its search for food and will attack many items other than wood in its search for cellulose materials. It will damage wall lining boards, electrical wiring, and even personal possessions. Colonies often nest in trees or stumps but can form nests without ground contact.



Nasutitermes

There are several species of *Nasutitermes* which cause significant damage to timber in service. Soldier termites of these species are distinguished by their pointed heads. *Nasutitermes exitiosus* usually builds a low mound and is more common across Southern Australia. *Nasutitermes walkeri* builds part of its colony as a nest on the branch of a tree, the rest is constructed in the ground beneath it. This genus will mainly attack hardwood such as that found in fences and timber decking.



Mastotermes

Mastotermes darwiniensis, the Giant Northern Termite, is the most primitive of the commercially significant species. It shows an ability for sub-colonies to split off from the main colony and produce queens, without a mating flight. Eventually a network of interconnecting sub-colonies is established, which makes control difficult. These large termites can devastate buildings, bridges, poles, trees, and crops such as sugarcane. *Mastotermes* is found mainly north of the Tropic of Capricorn.



Schedorhinotermes

These termites cause damage approaching the severity caused by *Coptotermes*. They build fragile nests in places such as old tree stumps, in timber buried in the ground, in filled patios, and under fireplaces. The damage they cause is distinctive. Although it can be severe, it is often patchy with huge gouges taken out of sound timber, particularly around nails in floor boards or other timbers. *Schedorhinotermes* colonies contain major and minor soldiers.



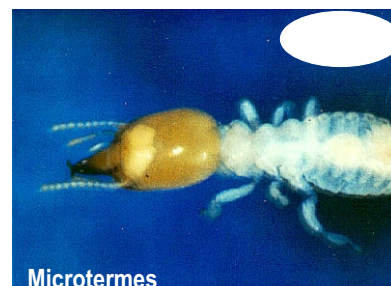
Heterotermes

Heterotermes are a significant structural pest throughout Queensland, northern WA, and the NT. In southern Australia they are only a minor nuisance. They are generally considered to do little damage to timber in service, restricting their attention to weathered timber fences, decking, and posts. Occasionally they can cause superficial damage to sound timber.



Microcerotermes

The genera *Microcerotermes* are found along the Coastal Queensland and New South Wales regions. They commonly attach their nest to a tree, and maintain a soil connection via galleries running down the surface of the trunk. However they also establish colonies under ground, in small mounds or on posts or poles. Their main point of entry to dwellings is decayed timbers in contact with the ground such as found with poles, posts, and fences.



Termite tips

Do not store timber or wood-based materials under or against a house or structure.

Do not build up soil, mulch or garden beds against the dwellings.

Keep all sub-floor areas clean, dry and well ventilated where possible.

Fix up leaking plumbing (eg. down-pipes, gutters and taps) and ensure that there is good drainage around the dwelling.

Have your EXODUS Pest Control technician conduct a thorough inspection of your home and surrounds at least every 12 months, and more frequently if you live in a high risk location.