



## Termites and Carpenter Ants

**Termites.** The most important and costly structural insect pest in Connecticut is the eastern subterranean termite. They range from 1/4 to 3/8 of an inch in length. The cream-colored workers are wingless and usually enter structures through wood that is in direct contact with the soil.

To help prevent termite problems, such direct contact of wood with soil should be eliminated. In some cases, termites may build mud tubes across surfaces such as concrete to allow them to reach the wood from the soil. The workers are very susceptible to desiccation. By moving through mud tubes they remain in contact with high humidity from the soil and avoid the drying effects of sunlight and air currents. If the tan mud tubes are found, they should be broken and the adjacent wood should be examined for termite damage.

The presence of winged reproductives, or swarmers, in a building is a good indicator that a colony of at least five years of age is present. Swarmers are black and are most frequently mistaken for "flying ants." Swarming generally occurs during early spring.

The differences between termites and ants are shown in the diagram. Note that termites do not have the narrow or constricted waist that ants possess. Termites also have straight rather than "elbowed" antennae.

Finding termites in a structure does not constitute an immediate emergency because the rate at which damage occurs is relatively slow. We strongly recommend hiring a licensed professional exterminator when termite control is needed.

**Carpenter ants.** These are the largest of our local ants and may excavate areas of moist wood for nests. **The damage caused is much less severe than that of termites.** Carpenter ants may be all black or may also have a reddish-brown area in the middle of their bodies. Workers are 1/4 to 1/2 an inch in length. The winged reproductives or swarmers are 1/2 to 3/4 of an inch in length, and their presence indicates a colony that is at least three years old.

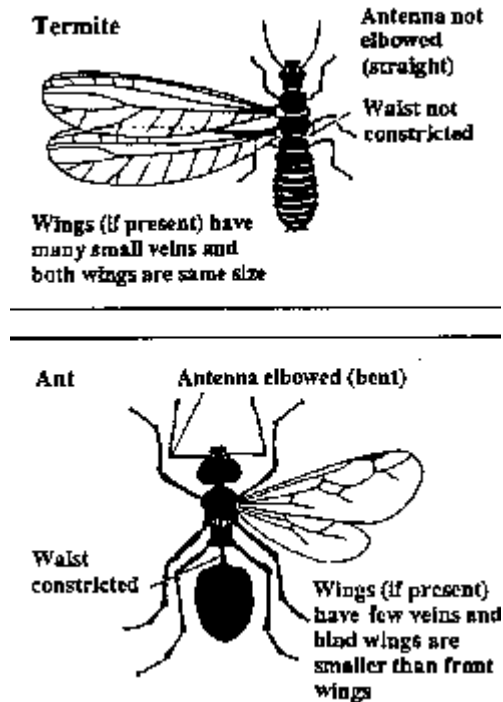
The mere presence of these ants does not always mean that they are living or nesting in the house. If only a few ants are seen, they are probably only foragers from the outdoors. Workers can forage hundreds of feet from a colony in search of food. Larger numbers found daily, unexplained small piles of sawdust or ants active during the winter are good indications that the building may contain a nest. Ants (unlike termites) do not eat the wood but excavate it for a nest. Carpenter ants may also live in wall void areas without affecting the wood.

Moist areas with damp wood, however, are often preferred sites of infestation. Such areas may include wood moistened by leaking or sweating pipes in kitchen sink and bathroom areas. Other suspect areas may include leaky roofs and "punky" wood on decks, doors or windows. Such moisture-related problems should be repaired and deteriorating wood replaced.

To achieve effective carpenter ant control, any nests in the building must be found and eliminated. To help locate nests indoors, use "crack and crevice" ant and roach sprays directed into suspect areas. If the spray reaches a nest, ant activity will increase, and ants may appear, alerting you to the nesting area. Once

the nest is found and exposed, the ants may be controlled with an ant and roach aerosol spray mist. Foragers from the outside may be reduced by applying a spray treatment of diazinon or chlorpyrifos (Dursban) to the outside foundation. Also, two new baits have been introduced for carpenter ant control: Raid Max Ant Bait (Johnson Wax Co.), and Combat (American Cyanamid Co.). Baits, however, may take several weeks or months to achieve control. If all efforts to control carpenter ants fail, a licensed professional may be required.

### Termite vs. Ant



**More information.** For further information see circulars 82-10, *Termites*. 72-46, *Suggestions on Selecting Termite Control Services*; and 68-53, *Carpenter Ants and Their Control*, available from your local Cooperative Extension Center or from Agricultural Publications, U-35, Storrs, CT 06269-4035.

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