

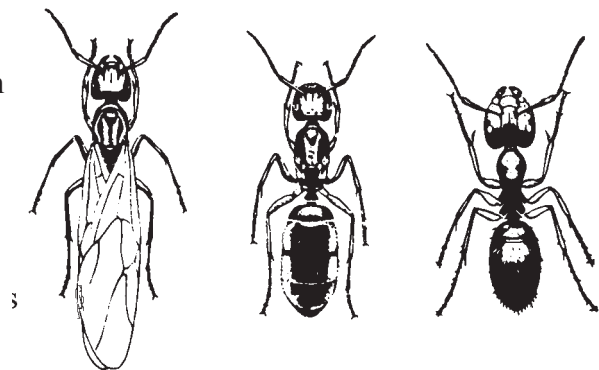


# Carpenter Ants

## Introduction

Carpenter ants, along with termites, are the most troublesome structural pest in New Hampshire. Four species live in the state, three entirely black, the fourth black with a red-brown midsection. Adults vary in length from  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch long for workers and  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch for the queens. Only the reproductive forms (kings and queens) have wings; they shed their wings before selecting a nesting site.

Winged carpenter ants are frequently confused with winged termites. Winged termites are found in early spring and can be easily distinguished from ants by the following comparisons:



*Ant*



*Termite*

**Wings:** *Hind wing shorter than fore wing*  
**Body:** *Narrow waist*  
**Antennae:** *Elbowed*

*Wings equal in length*  
*No waist*  
*Straight, segments like beads*

## Life cycle and habits

A single winged female carpenter ant begins a colony by shedding her wings and selecting a desirable nesting site, generally moist wood that has weathered and begun to decay. In buildings this may be in porch columns, steps, corners of buildings, under eaves, between walls, in door and window frames, beams, and joists. Outdoor nests frequently are found in woodpiles, stumps, fence and telephone posts and rotten trees. Therefore, foraging ants found within a building may come from a nest established either within the building or from outdoors.

Carpenter ant workers do not eat wood as termites do, but excavate galleries to rear their young. Unlike termite galleries that are packed with a mud-like deposit, carpenter ant galleries are clean with smooth walls. Carpenter ants feed on other insects, aphid honeydew, plant juices, sweets, and scraps of food.

During the winter the nests are inactive, but individuals occasionally come out on warm days. Winged males and females emerge in the spring and summer. A new colony will increase and survive for several years.

## **Control**

Preventive measures include eliminating stumps, storing firewood away from the house and off the ground, reducing humidity and preventing structural wood from getting wet. This may require repairing plumbing leaks, improving the ventilation in crawl spaces and making roof or structural repairs. Improving ventilation will be especially helpful in basements, attics and crawl spaces. Keeping trees and bushes from touching the house will reduce the chances of foraging ants coming indoors.

To control carpenter ants, it is essential to locate and apply the chemical control directly to the nest. The presence of "sawdust" does not prove you have found the nest; it only indicates carpenter ant activity. Look in places most likely to harbor moist wood, such as porch floors and columns, eaves, sills, roof joints, and in the wood below leaking roof gutters. You can recognize the nest as the place where you find ant pupae and larvae. In some situations it may be possible to eliminate the nest by removing the wood it is in. When you disturb a nest, the ants quickly carry the white, oval pupae (often mistaken for eggs) and the white, worm-like larvae to safety.

By watching the activities of worker ants you can often discover their avenues of entrance into the walls or moldings. Sometimes, by feeling with your hand, you can detect an increase in temperature in the wood where the nest is located. In the outdoors, inspect piles of wood, old stumps and trees with rotted wood. Branches hanging over and touching the roof of the house may be inviting outdoor ants to enter the building.

You can get some reduction in ant numbers by applying pesticides to baseboards, moldings, sills and behind appliances. Due to recent regulatory changes, there are fewer products available for use by someone without a pesticide applicator's license. Boric acid is one material that is still available. Trade names include "Roach Prufe Odorless Non-Staining Powder" and "R Value's Roach Kil." Liquid formulations of pesticides containing bifenthrin, deltamethrin, esfenvalerate, lambda-cyhalothrin, permethrin, or pyrethrins are available for ant control.

Pressurized aerosol sprays are not designed to give effective, long-lasting ant control, so we do not recommend them for carpenter ants.

Bait cups for ants are widely available, with hydramethylnon the most common active ingredient. Except in spring, it may be hard to get carpenter ants to consume baits, however. Gel and liquid bait forms are probably more effective than granules for carpenter ants; a sugary bait is best. Bait cups are not an effective approach for serious carpenter ant infestations, however. If you see large numbers of ants indoors and suspect a severe infestation, we recommend consulting a licensed pest control firm. Professional exterminators have access to stronger, longer-lasting pesticides not available to the general public.

Perimeter sprays around the outside of foundations, windows and doors may kill foraging ants and help keep outdoor ants from migrating indoors. Registered pesticides include various synthetic pyrethroids, such as cyfluthrin and cypermethrin. Many of the pesticide products labeled for ant control, among them Sevin, Dursban, Baygon, Diazanone and Malathion, are being phased out by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to reduce people's exposure to toxic substances. New products available to the general public contain very low concentrations of different active ingredients and may not be as effective as those available to licensed pesticide applicators.

***Stop!*** *This publication contains pesticide recommendations that are subject to change at any time. UNH Cooperative Extension provides these recommendations only as a guide. It is always the pesticide applicator's responsibility, by law, to read and follow all current label directions for the specific pesticide being used. Because of constantly changing labels and product registration, some of the recommendations offered in this publication may no longer be legal by the time you read them. Contact the NH Division of Pesticide Control at (603) 271-3550 to check registration status. If any information in these recommendations disagrees with the label, you must disregard the recommendations and follow the label directions. No endorsement is intended for products mentioned, no criticism intended for products not mentioned.*

Store pesticides in their original containers in a locked cabinet or shed away from food. Dispose of unused pesticides or empty containers safely, according to NH regulations. If you suspect pesticide poisoning, call the New Hampshire Poison Control Center at 1-800-562-8236.

*Reviewed and amended by Dr. Alan Eaton, UNH Cooperative Extension Entomology Specialist.  
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