

NEWS RELEASE
March 27, 2002

ANTS

BACKYARD HORTICULTURE
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Ants are a very common occurrence now in Mariposa County. In fact they are among the most prevalent pests in households. Once ants have established a colony inside or near a building, they may be difficult to control. Although a nuisance when in the house, ants do perform many useful functions in the environment, such as feeding on other pests (e.g., fleas, caterpillars, termites), dead insects, and decomposing tissue from dead animals.

According to the University of California leaflet on ants (available free from the UCCE office in Mariposa), the most common ant occurring in and around the house and garden is the Argentine ant. Other common ant pests include the pharaoh ant, the odorous house ant, the thief ant and the southern fire ant. Less common, but of great importance, is the red imported fire ant, which has recently gained a foothold as close as Merced County.

Adult workers of the Argentine and odorous house ant are about 1/8 inch long and range from light to dark brown in color; those of the pharaoh and thief ant are smaller, measuring about 1/25 inch long. The workers of the southern fire ant vary in size and have a red head and thorax with a black abdomen. Carpenter ants also invade buildings in California. Although they do not eat wood as termites do, they hollow it out

to nest and may cause considerable damage. These ants vary greatly in size from 1/4 to 3/4 inch long.

LIFE CYCLE AND HABITS

Ants usually nest in soil and feed on fruits, seeds, nuts, fatty substances, dead or live insects, dead animals, and sweets. Ants enter buildings seeking food and water, warmth and shelter, or a refuge from dry, hot weather or flooded conditions. They may appear suddenly in buildings if other food sources become unavailable or weather conditions change.

MANAGEMENT

Ant management requires the combined use of mechanical, cultural, sanitation, and often chemical methods of control. It is unrealistic and impractical to attempt to totally eliminate ants from an outdoor area. Focus your management efforts on excluding ants from buildings. Remember that ants play a beneficial role in the garden in some cases.

EXCLUSION AND SANITATION

To keep ants out of buildings, caulk cracks around foundations that provide entry from outside. Store attractive food items such as sugar, syrup, and honey in closed containers. Rinse out empty soft drink containers or remove them from the building. Thoroughly clean up grease and spills. Do not store garbage indoors

BAITS

One way to control ants in and around structures is to use toxic baits. Baits are formulated as solids or liquids and applied in stations or in the case of granules by broadcasting them. Ants are attracted to the bait and carry small portions of it back to

the nest where it is given to other workers, larvae, and reproductive forms. To achieve wide distribution of the bait so the entire colony will be killed, the bait toxicant must be slow acting. Some examples of toxicants used in ant baits are hydramethylnon, boric acid, and fipronil.

Place bait stations in places where the ants can easily find them, but avoid placing them in areas that are accessible to small children and pets. In addition to placing ant bait stations indoors, space them every 10 to 20 feet outside around the foundation and at nest openings if they can be found. Control with baits is not immediate and may take several weeks or more to be complete. In the case of Argentine ants, sweet baits (e.g., Grant's Ant Stakes, Dr. Moss's Liquid Bait System) are attractive year-round. Protein baits (e.g., Combat ant baits) are more attractive in spring when the colony is producing brood.

INDOOR SPRAYS

While there are many insecticides labeled for ant control indoors, sponging or mopping with soapy water, as an alternative to insecticides, may be as effective in temporarily removing foraging ants in a building because it removes the ant's scent trail.

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