

**Ask Jon Eakes**

# **Carpenter Ants & Identifying ants in general**

Last Updated: Monday, November 25th, 2019, Created: Sunday, April 20th, 2008

Carpenter Ants are probably one of the most home damaging insects in Canada and one of the most difficult to control. They don't eat the lumber in the walls of your house; they just dig tunnels through it to make a comfortable living space, but that tunnelling can destroy the structural integrity of your walls. They generally travel outside the house to find food and carry it back to the house. Sometimes the primary nest can be in your walls, sometimes it is in a log outdoors and you are just a satellite nest, meaning that even if you kill all the ants in your wall you may not have gotten the queen. Although native to tropical regions, Canada does have some clusters of Termite infestions -- see TERMITES.

## **PRO OR DIY?**

I am sorry to say that I agree with the professional exterminators who will tell you that most efforts at killing carpenter ants in a DIY fashion will probably fail. The most useful thing you can do to discourage the ants is to move firewood, overhanging branches and such things away from the house -- but even with those precautions, these hard working little bugs can go over 300 feet from the house looking for food. Non-toxic diatomaceous earth sprinkled around the house on a regular basis can block their path on the ground, but inspect for ants running along electrical wires as well. What you don't want to do with carpenter ants is to bang on the wall or open the wall for inspection. If you disturb or expose them, they will move the entire nest to another section of the wall within minutes -- long before you have time to get them with a pesticide. Professionals will drill small holes to not disturb the ants, then fill the wall with pesticide smoke.

## **IDENTIFY THE ENEMY**

It is a good idea before panicking too much to know if you really have house destructive carpenter ants or house eating termites, or some type of non-destructive forging ant before going too far, certainly before you start ripping open walls. Start by trapping one of the ants and then take a close look at it with a magnifying glass. It is easy to tell termites from ants. Ants have an hourglass like figure joined in the centre by a very thin stem. Termites have a rather straight oblong body of equal thickness and are about half an inch long.

The University of California has a great little interactive web site that will allow you to Identify your Ant. If the result of this exercise is that you do indeed have Carpenter ants I would recommend that you visit a very informative site set up by Pest Control Canada.

If it is not carpenter ants who are invading your home, follow this link for controlling more ordinary insects.

People constantly complain that they get different extermination plans from different "professionals". It is true that there are several possible ways to attack the problem. The best thing I can recommend is that, as with all contractors, get references from clients who had the same problem and call those references to see just how it worked out. That will help you to feel confident that you have located a contractor who really can solve your problem.

## **WHAT YOU CAN DO YOURSELF**

For a compilation of homeowner control measures insects in general, follow this link to Controlling Insects.

**Keywords:**

