Know About Carpenter Ants and Prevent Carpenter Ants Problems by Ethen Hunt

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Carpenter ants are among the largest ant species. Like other ant species carpenter ants are social and live in colonies. They have several adult forms that perform different jobs inside the colony. Carpenter ants range in different lengths. The largest being the queen and the workers range in size from a quarter inch to roughly a half inch in length. Only the carpenter ant queen produces offspring in the nest. Immature ants are white legless and are maggot like in appearance. Adult ants will vary in color depending upon the species. The black carpenter ant is the species that most commonly nests in homes. Other Carpenter ant species may be more reddish brown or yellow in color.

In the spring carpenter ants swarm. This swarmers role is in reproduction. Shortly after mating the female loses her wings and searches out a cavity where she begins to lay eggs and produces colony workers. The workers care for the queen as she produces more offspring and they assume the task of forging for food and maintaining and expanding the nest. After 3 to 6 years a colony can contain roughly 3000 workers and will start to produce swarmers. Unlike termites carpenter ants do not eat wood, they tunnel through the wood building or expanding their nest. Typical outdoor nesting sites include tree holes, tree stumps, logs, standing dead trees, and planter boxes. When conditions are right carpenter ants may establish nests inside homes. Typical indoor nesting sites include structural wood, wall voids, attic areas, insulation, hollow doors, windows and door casings and voids beneath kitchen and bathroom cabinets. Carpenter ants prefer wood with a moisture content of 15% or higher so the problem is often associated with moisture. The ants often invade homes through the cracks and crevices in the foundation masonry around windows and doors, through foundations, as well as heating and AC vents. They may travel along tree limbs or shrubs that touch the siding and the roof gaining access to the attic areas. Telephone, electric and cable TV lines also provide a ready means of entering the home. When the ants invade homes they usually seek out sweet items such as sugar but they also will feed on fats grease and meets. Water is an important aspect for ants. You will often find ants collecting were dripping water exists, spigots, downspouts, and air conditioning drain lines. When indoors, the ants will often seek out sinks bathtubs and dishwashers.

There are several indications of carpenter ant infestation.

The appearance of swarmers indoors is a likely indication of the nest in or under the house. The appearance of workers may also be a sign of infestation . Beginning in early spring worker ants will often be found foraging for water around bathrooms, kitchens sinks, dishwashers are showers.

Foraging activity is usually greater at night when the lights are off but you can find ants all day long. Sometimes mature colonies that infest homes can be heard rustling from the wood or void where the ants are nesting.

Sawdust or frass. As the ants nest in wood saw dust like piles of fiber like wood debris can usually be seen under the nesting areas. Debris dark in appearance is likely an indication of decaying wood and can be used as a clue when searching for the carpenter ant nest. Damage wood that is damaged by carpenter ants may have slit like openings through which the ants expel the sawdust and frass. The galleries will usually follow the wood grain with the softer springwood portion of the annual rings being excavated first.

Preventing Carpenter Ant Problems:

Any time there are trees, stumps or other wood materials around the home there is always the

potential for a carpenter ant problem. However there are important steps that you can take now to prevent carpenter ants from becoming a problem. Prevention starts with a common sense inspection not with monthly or periodic pesticide application. Proper maintenance of the building and surroundings greatly reduces the likelihood of carpenter ant problems. The key point to remember is that carpenter ants are attracted to moisture.

Controlling Carpenter Ants:

It is important to remember that finding carpenter ants foraging inside the building does not necessarily mean that they are nesting indoors. Do not panic and do not resort to spraying insecticides indoors where you see ants. Although spraying stops the foraging for awhile it only serves to deploy the ants elsewhere and they will likely return when the chemical residue was gone. More importantly you might be delaying the inevitable discovery that the ants are actually damaging the building. The first step in controlling carpenter ants is to determine if they are nesting indoors. Spraying the foundation with any of the commonly available insecticides may keep foraging ants away temporarily giving you a clue to the source of the ants.

Indoor Infestations:

Simply spraying surfaces where you see the foraging ants is not likely to solve the problem. The ants are likely to move to some other area and may return later when the chemical residue is diminished. Ant baits particularly those containing boric acid can be effective if the ants are foraging for food. If the ants are gathering around water sources they may not be attracted immediately to the bait. In general baits are the best approach to dealing with ants. Theyâ€™re more effective in the long term and less hazardous as compared to sprays when used properly. However they may require 7 to 10 days before activity declined significantly. You must be willing to tolerate some ant activity to give the foragers enough time to carry the bait back to the nest where it will be fed to the larvae other workers and eventually to the Queen. Do not spray areas where you will place the bait otherwise the ants will avoid these areas and not pick up the bait. If ant activity continues at about the same level for several weeks then you need to take additional steps to deal with the problem. Before spraying you should first determine the extent of any structural damage caused by the ants. That may require moving siding or portions of drywall. If the damage is severe repairing and or replacing the wood subsequently removing the nest maybe more important in any treatment and may solve a problem in the process. If damage is minor then you can use a pesticide that is labeled for the application to wood to eliminate the nest. Effective control often requires the injection of insecticide into the voids or into the nest itself. These treatments are complex and may be too difficult for the average person itâ€™s better to have a qualified pest control operator treat for the ants.

Outdoor Treatments:

If the ants are foraging from an outdoor nest that cannot be found then a perimeter treatment can help. Liquid or granular insecticide applied along the foundation will cut foraging activity temporarily but they will not prevent ants from returning at some later date. A better choice might be a granular ant bait sprinkled on the soil along the foundation. Combat which is available in most retail stores are commonly used for ants including carpenter ants other baits are also readily available.

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