

Armies of Ants

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“The ants come marching one by one, hurrah, hurrah, the ants come marching one by one, the little one stops to play on drum – and they all go marching down, to the ground, to get out, of the rain.”

Ants are very unique insects with the ability to find the most remote piece of sugar or food droppings left on counter tops. Ants, as well as bees and termites, live in colonies. An ant colony is made up of one or more queens, winged females that can become queen, winged males, workers, and in some ant colonies there are soldiers, which defend the colony. On Guam, ant colonies search, in marching assemblies, for food and shelter in homes and gardens. Ants, like humans, have certain food preferences. Some like proteins, which they obtain from meat, peanut butter, or chewing up their favorite insect – the termite. Some have an extraordinary addiction to sweets like processed sugar, cereal, and all types of candy. Lastly, there are some ants that like fatty foods in the form of grease, butter, or lard.

The most common questions asked about ants are, “how do they manage to get inside our homes, where is their nest, and most frequently – how do I get rid of them?”

Most homes on the island have numerous points of entry for ants. They get through cracks and crevices in cement walls and floors. They can walk underneath doors and through poorly fastened windows, and walk along plumbing and electrical pipes from underneath the house. There are some ant species that produce winged



males and females that can easily fly into dwellings. Ants can invade homes at any time of the year, but they seem to be especially plentiful during heavy rains or during dry periods when looking for food, shelter, and water.

Ant nests can be located both inside and outside the house. Often, ants are seen in the home moving in a line, along a trail. This is because the first ants to arrive leave a chemical trail so

that their siblings back in the colony can eventually find the same food or shelter. One method to find their nest is to follow the ant trail back to its entry point inside the house. If the ants seem to be coming out of the wall or floor, they may be nesting inside the wall or coming from outside the house. Outside, many nests can be found in or around trees or shrubs that are planted in close proximity to the outside walls. Many times, they bring outside soil particles into the house. Ants may also be nesting in potted plants located either inside or outside the house. Even the keenest eyes may have difficulties trying to locate ant-nesting sites. However, controlling their presence can be achieved without knowing the nesting site.

There are two types of ant control – physical and chemical. Reducing the ant food supply is the best way to discourage invasions inside the house without using certain chemicals. Keeping the kitchen clean by wiping off kitchen counters and stovetops helps reduce the amount of available food to foraging ants. The key is to discourage ants from finding even the tiniest amount of



food. Food items like sugar, peanut butter, and leftovers should be sealed and properly put away. Trash cans that are kept in or near the house must be kept closed and cleaned periodically. Using a soapy sponge to wipe up the ants and their trails is another quick and safe solution to their invasion, however temporary.

With the present development of over-the-counter ant baits, the use of more toxic pesticides has been greatly reduced. In past years, one would grab the closest can of ant or roach spray and go on a spraying frenzy to kill off the little “buggers.” The problem with this type of insect control is that the pesticide-product is being sprayed in all directions and the chemical leftovers that are not wiped up are likely to be more harmful than the invading ants.

Most grocery stores and hardware stores on island sell ant bait stations that are packaged in handy, flat, small-round disposable containers. Make sure the product states ANT bait and not cockroach bait, as both are packaged in the same way. The big advantage with these ant baits

is that they are environmentally friendly. No spraying or unwanted chemical leftover are involved. The ant nest does not need to be located because ant baits work on the principle of attracting ants with preferred food and incorporating in the food a very slow acting poison. The ants eat the bait and take it back to the nest to feed the younger members of the colony, including the queen. The biggest disadvantage to ant baits is that there are some ants that are only attracted to certain baits than others. The food-like attractant and poisons inside these bait stations are different depending on the manufactured product. It is advisable to purchase a few different types of ant baits, noting the different active ingredient (poison) on the label. The name of the active ingredient will be found on the product label. One should place these baits where ant activity is most noticeable.

For ant bait and control recommendations, you can contact your local Cooperative Extension Service in Guam and throughout Micronesia.

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