General Ant Control

By DoMyOwn staff

Prevention:

The best approach to ant control in the home is cleanliness. Any type of food or food particles can attract and provide food for ants. Store food in tight containers. Remove plants that can attract ants or control aphids, whiteflies and other insects that produce honeydew. Reduce moisture sources, including condensation and leaks. Inspection. Location of the nest is the key to control because ants are social insects. Large numbers of individual ants can be killed without ever solving the problem. Determine the kind of ant species. Most species of ants never enter buildings; others build their nests near buildings and forage indoors. Others usually nest indoors.

Keep a record of where ants have been seen. Some ants follow definite trails. If possible, follow these trails to the nest. Placement of attractive materials, such as jelly, oils, protein and other materials can attract large numbers of ants so they can be followed to their nest.

Often children like to watch ants and can be very useful in tracing their trails. Outdoors, ant nests can often be located by seeing ant hills on the ground. Some ants deposit earth on the soil surface when they construct the nest. Fire ants and certain other ants build conspicuous mounds. Nests may also be constructed next to or under the house foundation, under sidewalks, driveways and patios, or in decaying logs or tree trunks.

Indoors, ants may nest in walls, behind a baseboard or under the house. Often ant trails enter through a crack but the nest may be some distance away. Some ants may also nest in decayed or rotting wood in the house.

Chemical Control:

Ants can be controlled with baits, crack and crevice treatments, indoor space and surface treatments, outdoor barrier and broadcast treatments, as well as void and attic treatments. However, methods that target individual trails of ants such as crack and crevice treatments and indoor space and surface treatments are usually a "quick fix" and ineffective in the long term because they do not significantly reduce the ant population and do not affect the queen.

Ant baits, however, were developed to exploit the foraging and nest mate feeding behaviors of ants. Bait treatments are effective for control of many ant species. Since ants rely heavily on trophallaxis (reciprocal feeding), the bait toxicant can be thoroughly distributed to the members of the colony, including the queen and brood. Baits are effective because they not only kill the foraging members of the colony, but they kill the queen(s) so no other ants are produced.

The ideal bait contains a slow-acting, non-repellent toxicant that is incorporated into a preferred food substrate. There are many types of baits on the market.

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In general, ant baits can be found as:

*Granules for broadcast

*Liquids

*Gels

*Ready-to-use, tamper resistant containers

Both granules and liquids can be used in specially designed stations. Liquids are usually prepackaged for use or come as part of a system that uses a bait station. Gel baits usually come prepackaged in large syringes for crack and crevice treatments.

For large areas, the most efficient management method is to broadcast bait with a granular. The application rate for most granular bait labels is 1 to 1.5 lb. per acre. This rate translates into about 7 to 9 granules per square foot for most baits. Granular ant baits can be broadcast in the landscape around structures and in lawns. Most granular baits that are labeled for broadcast use are also labeled for individual mound or nest treatments.

Use the following guidelines for successful baiting:

*Use fresh bait. If the bait is not fresh, ants will be less likely to eat it. Ants must eat the bait in order to be effective. If the bait smells like rancid oil or stale potato chips, the bait is spoiled.

*Wash your hands before baiting to prevent contamination from other products (and after baiting).

*Do not smoke while baiting. The nicotine will contaminate the bait.

Timing of the application is as important as the choice of control. Granular broadcast applications should be done in good weather. A good rule of thumb is to bait on a day that you would have a picnic; about 70 to 90°F and not immediately before or after a drenching rain. Also, turn off any irrigation for a few hours before and after baiting.

*Bait after the dew, rain or irrigation has dried. Water can ruin baits.

*Bait where you see the ants foraging.

*Store bait in an airtight container and place in a cool dry place, away from other pesticides or potential contaminants.

*Gel baits are particularly useful in crack and crevice treatments. In all cases of bait use, do not spray any insecticides around the bait application. Sprays are repellent and if they contaminate the bait, the bait treatment will be ineffective because the ants will not eat it.

For heavy infestations, we recommend a 3-Step Program:

1. Treat the perimeter with a repellent liquid or granular insecticide.

2. Broadcast bait with the appropriate product for your ant problem.

3. Individually treat remaining infestations, whether they are indoor or outdoor, such as fire ant mounds.

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