

So What About Ants?

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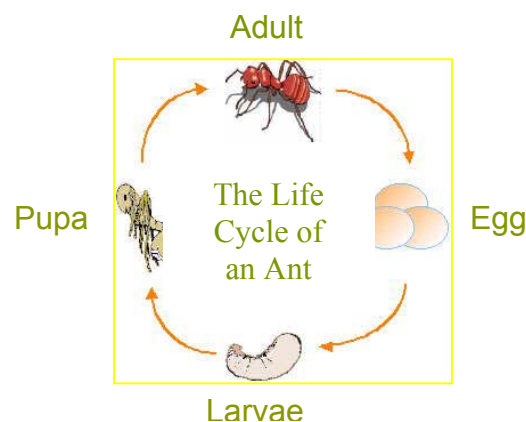
Ant Habits

Nests are normally permanent but new nest locations may be sought in adverse weather conditions.

Workers forage for food and mark their trails using pheromones and may be guided by landmarks, light or smell.

Some ant species specialise in their eating habits while others are scavengers.

There are approximately 3000 species of ants that nest in a variety of locations in Australia.



Ants are considered pests because;

Nuisance

Ants enter homes and cause considerable disruption and annoyance to the occupants

Structural

The removal of small amounts of soil from concrete and brick paving will eventually cause subsiding and cracking.

Damage

Ants remove planted seeds from the soil preventing germination.

Nests around the bases of small shrubs and trees result in undermining and may eventually topple them.

Health

The conveyance of some diseases such as Dysentery, Small Pox and Salmonella has been recorded.



Control Methods - What can I do?

Hygiene

External

Avoid leaving pet food lying around, rinse bottles and cans to remove food sources

Internal

Remove food particles from cupboards and shelves and seal food containers

Nests

Trail the ants to find their nesting areas.

Direct injection of the insecticide into the nest is the best and safest way to control the ant problem.

Bait

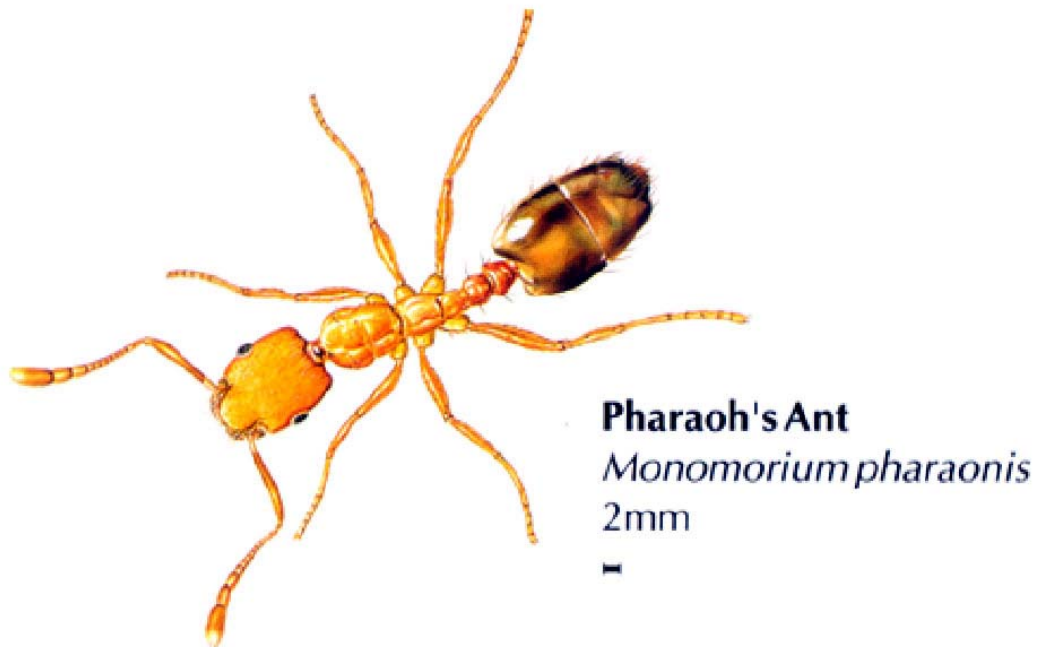
Mixing Borax and honey may be applied in known ant areas but must be kept out of the way of children and pets.

Dusts

Talc powder directly on the ants or down the ant nest may provide some control or contact your local Environmental Health Officer.

Physical Methods

Washing tracks with soap will remove any scent and reduce re-infestation.



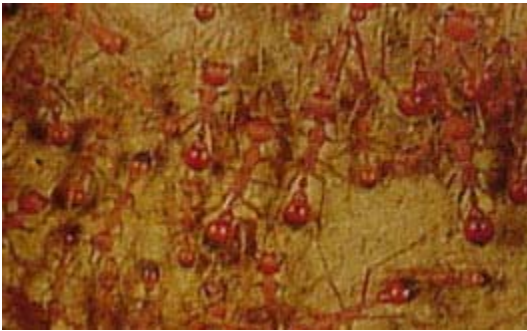
LIFE HISTORY

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All ants live in colonies which typically include a large force of workers and a single, or several queens, along with successive life-history stages, eggs, larvae and pupae; the composition may vary seasonally. The life cycle of the Red Bulldog Ant, *Myrmecia gulosa*, is illustrated below as an example. All Bulldog Ant

species are physically similar and easily recognised by their characteristic head and jaw structure. They differ greatly between species in colour and size, ranging from 8mm to 35mm long. They frequent all major habitats from rain forest to desert, coastal to alpine, including urban gardens and parks, but are generally absent from north-western Australia. They are aggressive insects with potent, painful, hypodermic stings. Many people react strongly to the injected venom, sometimes with anaphylaxis, or death (more frequently reported in fact than from shark attacks!) Those experiencing bad sting reactions should consult a specialist allergist.



1. Worker ants resting on the wall of a nest chamber.

The worker ants of most domestic pests forage in columns, and may co-operate in the return of larger items of booty. Adult ants imbibe liquid food, including sweet solutions, meat juices, and the blood of prey insects to maintain their day-to-day energy requirements.



2. Winged Male Ant

Male ants are winged and wasp-like, and do not closely resemble the workers or the queen. Their function is entirely for reproduction. They do no work in the nests, but are released for mating flights, then disperse and die.



3. A queen ant showing traces of wing stubs on the thorax

Queens in most species are much larger than the workers with a more complex thoracic structure. After the nuptial flight the young mated queens shed their wings and seek a sheltered spot to begin egg laying. Pest species often have several queens in each nest.



4. Eggs being tended by workers in the nest

All fertilised eggs are laid by the queen; she is the only mated reproductive in the colony and the mother of all its inhabitants. All ant workers are female, but (with rare exceptions) unable to mate or to lay fertilised eggs.



5. Larvae being tended by workers in the nest

Larvae feed voraciously as they grow. The brown beetle larva at lower centre was collected outside the nest by a foraging worker and returned as food for the larvae.



6. Pupal cocoons and a worker within the nest

These yellowy papery sacks are made of silk produced from glands opening near the mouths of the larvae. Inside their cocoons the larvae change to pupae, and later to adults. All of the other ants featured in this document have naked pupae, which lack cocoons and can look like white, immobile adults.

ANT SPECIES

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COASTAL BROWN ANT

(Subfamily Myrmicinae)

Originally from Africa, the Coastal Brown Ant, *Pheidole megacephala*, is prominent in domestic situations in the Perth/Fremantle area; Darwin; and east coast towns, south at least to Sydney. It is considered the major ant pest in many areas. Distinctive large-headed major workers are present along with ordinary workers. The majors defend the colony, and perform special tasks, such as seed-cracking. The waist is 2-jointed, and a sting is present. This ant infests houses, stores and gardens, taking food ranging from sugar to cheese, meat and bread.

Outside it tends sap-sucking bugs and interferes with gardening, cultivation and harvesting. Tropical crop trees like coffee can fall over because of soil loosening by Coastal Brown Ant nests.



SINGAPORE ANT

(Subfamily Myrmicinae)

The Singapore Ant, *Monomorium destructor*, is common in north-western Australia and is a major nuisance in houses, stores, gardens and crops. Like the Coastal Brown Ant it has large-headed major workers, a 2-segmented waist and a fairly potent sting. In this species the extremes between the largest-headed majors and the smallest workers (minors) are bridged by a range of ants which grade in size. The most troublesome attribute of this formidable pest is its attraction to plastics in electrical, irrigation and other equipment. The Singapore Ant is a major nuisance in tropical agriculture, especially where hand-cropping is practiced; it tends plant-disease transmitting aphids and other insects, and damages soil by its nesting.



PHARAOH'S ANT

(Subfamily Myrmicinae)

Pharaoh's Ant, *Monomorium pharaonis*, is relatively uncommon as a house and store pest in Australia. It has a 2-segmented waist like the Coastal Brown Ant, but lacks major workers. It frequently occurs in hospitals, and has earned the alternative name "Hospital Ant". This species infests foodstuffs of all kinds. Infestations can be quite large, including many queens. The workers may forage over large distances. Pharaoh's Ants commonly nest within the structure of buildings.



WHITE-FOOTED HOUSE ANT

(Subfamily Dolichoderinae)

The White-footed House Ant, *Technomyrmex albipes*, ranges from SE Asia to Eastern Australia and New Zealand. It is one of the three small, dolichoderine ants which are major pests in Australia. These species lack major workers; they have 1 segmented waist nodes and do not sting (their venom is smeared from the tip of the abdomen). All are relatively soft-bodied and easily squashed when

crushed between fingers. White-footed House Ants are dull cloudy black in colour, with largely white legs. These ants can live well in gardens and domestic surrounds. They enter houses most frequently in dry periods seeking water in kitchens or bathrooms; and will eat sweet substances or meat. Indoors, nests may utilise any suitable space: wall and ceiling voids, insulation batts, even small, empty, storage containers.



GREEN WEAVER ANT

(Subfamily Formicinae)

The native Green Weaver Ant, *Oecophylla smaragdina*, is native across northern tropical Australia. It does not sting, but bites painfully, and sprays venom from the tip of the abdomen, irritating the bite wounds. *Oecophylla* constructs its (up to) football sized nests in trees by joining leaves together with silk from the larvae. One colony can include a number of nests on several trees, and enormous populations can develop. It is a major nuisance to people near the nesting trees, especially those harvesting tropical fruit crops like mangoes and citrus. This is considered a serious horticultural and garden nuisance in the Darwin and Cairns areas.



MEAT ANTS

(Subfamily Dolichoderinae)

One or more native Meat Ants usually occurs in dry situations across much of Australia. *Iridomyrmex purpureus* is the most widespread. These relatively large dolichoderines do not nest in buildings, but have large, roughly circular, low-profile nest mounds, up to several metres in diameter, characteristically surfaced with fine gravel and pebbles, and with many small separate nest entrances scattered on their surfaces. *I. purpureus* is especially attracted to meat and can be a pest in abattoirs. It can cause structural damage to paths, small buildings etc. by undermining their foundations.



BLACK HOUSE ANT

(Subfamily Dolichoderinae)

The Black House Ant, *Ochetellus* (formerly *Iridomyrmex*) *glaber*, occurs in Australia over much of the range of the White-footed House Ant and has similar behaviour. It commonly nests within the structure of buildings. *O. glaber* is adept at importing and tending aphids and other bugs on domestic pot plants. It is a

little smaller and stockier than the White-footed House Ant, and more intensely black, with a sometimes subtle, but distinct, purplish blue-green iridescence. The White-footed and Black House Ants have a distinctive strong odour when crushed, but the smell is reportedly imperceptible to some noses.



ARGENTINE ANT

(Subfamily Dolichoderinae)

The Argentine Ant, *Linepithema humile* (formerly *Iridomyrmex humilis*), introduced from South America, is a pest to Sydney, Melbourne, Hobart, Northern Tasmania and Perth. Argentine Ant infestations can be immense because the mated queens disperse only a short distance on foot from the nest with a contingent of workers. Colonies thus become continuous and enormous, with hundreds of queens and millions of workers. Even well secured cupboards and refrigerators are not proof to these efficient marauders. The Argentine Ant is declared pest but former government control measures have been largely abandoned. *L. humile* resembles the White-footed House Ant but it is light brown in colour, and lacks the strong smell when crushed.

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