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Argentine ants

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Argentine ants

DPIRD-176

Argentine ants (*Linepithema humile*) are small, brown, and notorious worldwide for being one of the most difficult and costly ants to control, as it can involve ongoing and repetitive use of residual, contact insecticides. The ants are established in Western Australia (WA).

Identification and reporting

Report any unfamiliar, problematic, or possible pest ants to the department's Pest and Disease Information Service (PaDIS) by calling +61 8 9368 3080 or email padis@dpird.wa.gov.au. Otherwise, use our MyPestGuide Reporter app, available on the website at dpird.wa.gov.au.

Impacts

- Quickly eliminate other ants, especially native ants, from an infested area.
- Eat a wide range of food including sweet drinks, pet food, meat, live and dead insects.
- Rob and stress commercial beehives and can be a significant pest in orchards and horticulture.
- Can attack nesting birds, hatching eggs, insects, and other fauna.
- Readily bite, although the bites are not painful.

What to look for

- Small and slender (2.6 to 3.2 mm long), dark brown ants, uniform in shape and size.
- Slight greasy, musty, or rancid odour when crushed.
- Heavy ant trails are often seen on the trunks of trees, walls, and bins.
- Unlike most other ant species, Argentine ants readily climb on a hand placed in their path.

Where to look

- Paths, garden beds, lawns, kerbing, tree trunks, and reticulation piping.
- Outdoor areas, but they may come indoors in large numbers in search of food and moisture.

How they spread

Argentine ants are spread unintentionally through the transport of materials including soil, turf, pot plants, foods, and garbage. Check pot plants and other plant material you receive is free of ants. If moving house and taking plants, or giving plants away, check they are free of ants. Treat infested plants by immersing them for at least 30 seconds in an insecticide solution. When using insecticides, always follow label recommendations.

Treatment

Ants are best managed in spring and summer before their populations peak.

How to keep Argentine ants out of buildings

Physical: Seal cracks and crevices through which ants are entering. Once sealed, be watchful, as the ants are likely to find alternative routes that will need to be sealed.

Chemical: An insecticide barrier can be sprayed around the entire outside perimeter of the building, including doorways, windowsills, and any adjoining patios and pergolas.

Insecticides

Always read and follow product label directions.

Small populations may be controlled with sugar-based gel bait formulations, available from supermarkets, hardware stores, and online.

Low toxicity liquid insecticides, available from garden centres and hardware stores, are ideal for use as barriers. Spray 0.5 m up outside walls and 0.5 m out from external walls.

Insecticidal dusts and powders, and granular ant baits, are not recommended for Argentine ants.

Safely use insecticide sprays

Before spraying, remove any toys, clothes, and pet food and drink containers from the area. Exclude people and pets from the sprayed area until the treatment is dry.

At the time of spraying, ensure wind conditions are calm, and ground surfaces are dry. Avoid watering treated areas for at least 24 hours after treatment. Rainfall or watering of treated surfaces before this period will reduce the effectiveness of the insecticide by diluting it.

To protect fish and aquatic invertebrates, take care not to contaminate ponds and waterways.

Only a small percentage of the ant population, those outside the nest, will be directly controlled. However, further control occurs as the ants are forced to forage outside the nest for food and water while the insecticide residues remain at lethal levels.

A second treatment may be required 2 to 4 weeks after the initial application if populations remain high, otherwise spot treatments of resurgent activity after initial broadscale treatments can substantially increase the period over which ants are controlled.

If your control methods for Argentine ant are unsuccessful, you can email photographs or send samples to PaDIS to confirm the species and advise on the most effective treatment.

How to treat severe infestations

Contact a professional pest controller to undertake treatment.

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