

Preventing Termite Infestations

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Termites live in the soil and they eat wood. It makes sense that they prefer to feed on wood touching or buried in the soil. Studies have shown that more than 90% of termite infestations in houses can be traced to wood that is either buried in the soil or touching the soil surface. Elimination of wood/soil contact is the number one action people can take to make their home less likely to be infested by termites.

During housing construction, wood debris is sometimes accidentally buried in the fill next to the house. This situation can result in a termite infestation and subsequent problems in getting an effective barrier treatment.

Decks and wooden porches can touch the soil and cause a termite problem. The wood should be placed on a concrete footing several inches above the soil surface. Decks and porches should be constructed of wood that has been pressure-treated with a wood preservative. Redwood is somewhat more resistant to termites than other wood, but it is not as resistant as pressure-treated wood.

What about wood chips used to mulch plants around the house? Wood chips will work into the soil over time and serve as a source of food for termites. It would be best not to use them next to the house, but there are no studies that indicate



In Nebraska, termites usually swarm about April 15, but swarming activity is often related to weather conditions. Swarming termites found inside a structure indicates a termite problem that needs attention.

how far from the house is safe. Wood chips made of redwood, cypress or cedar will be somewhat termite resistant, but, over time, the naturally occurring resins in these materials will leach into the soil and termites

attractiveness of these areas to termites. Take a look around your house and make sure water drains away from the foundation. Now is a good time to clean-out gutters and downspouts and repair or replace those that leak.

will readily feed on these mulches.

To prevent termite damage, firewood should be stored on a concrete pad and never stored against the house. You can still burn termite-damaged wood, but it will be light and burn too fast to be a good fuel.

In nature, termites feed on dead tree roots. If you have lost a tree or shrub near the house, you may want to dig the roots out, rather than letting the natural decomposition process take its course.

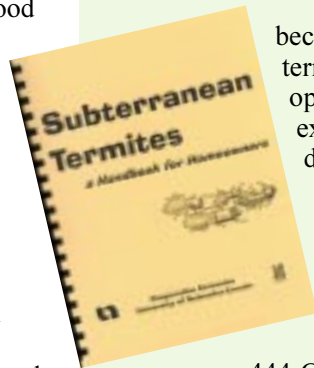
Because termites need moisture, moisture problems near the foundation can increase the

Termite Control Workshop on May 16

Making decisions about termites is stressful because many homeowners do not understand termites and all available termite control options. Because termite control can be expensive, making hasty and uninformed decisions can be costly.

To become better informed about this topic, attend a workshop "Everything Homeowners Should Know About Termites and Termite Control" on Thursday, May 16 from 6:30 to 9:30 p.m. It will be held at the Lancaster Extension Education Center,

444 Cherrycreek Road. The cost is \$20, which includes training and reference materials. This workshop will also be held in Lexington, Grand Island, Omaha and Wilber. Please call 441-7180 for more information or to pre-register.



Controlling Rabbit Damage in the Backyard

Cottontail rabbits are common in Lancaster County. During the day, they can be seen hopping around backyards or out in the country. They also leave "signs." These are tracks that are narrow and paired and droppings that are pea-sized and in pellet groups.

Cottontail rabbits prefer to eat young, succulent, green vegetation, flowers, vegetables and crops during the growing season. In winter, when there is little green vegetation, rabbits may turn to trees and shrubs for food.

As with most wildlife damage, you should strive for the reduction of damage to a tolerable level rather than the total elimination of damage. A combination of methods is usually best for controlling rabbit damage.

Your Best Bet? Keep Them Out!

Excluding rabbits from valuable plants is a long-term solution to costly damage. A fence of one-inch mesh chicken wire will keep all rabbits out of a garden or flower bed. Bury the bottom edge of the fence about four inches below ground. A

two-foot high fence will keep cottontails out during the growing season. If you are putting up a fence that will also be used to keep rabbits out during winter, consider the depth of the snow—that will help you decide how high the fence will need to be.

Take Away Their Shelter

Cottontails cannot live in areas without cover, that protects them from severe weather and predators (including cats and dogs). Remove brush piles, weed patches, rock piles and other debris where cottontails hide. Remove tall weeds and other escape cover from new windbreaks and hedgerows. Mow within three to four feet of recently planted trees and shrubs. You may need to control vegetation for five to ten years before perennials become more resistant to rabbit damage.

Provide Alternate Foods

Alternate foods can be provided to rabbits, to distract rabbits from valuable plants, but they are of little long-term value,



Rabbit damage to tree.

as they may attract more rabbits and lead to greater damage problems. Over a short period, an alternate food may be successful if it is more attractive (i.e., alfalfa hay) to the rabbits than the protected plants.

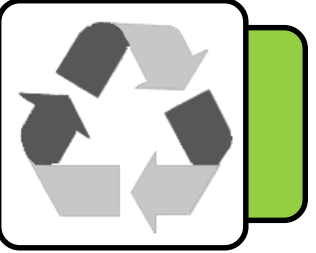
Frightening Devices

Scarecrows, plastic owls, rubber snakes, pinwheels, pie pans spinning in the wind and even more creative devices have been staked out in gardens in the hopes that they will frighten the rabbits. Frightening devices are simple to use, but they cannot be relied on to protect plants from damage because rabbits learn quickly to ignore the noise and movement of these devices.

Repellents

Repellents may temporarily

Environmental Focus



Earth Day Events

Neighborhood Clean-ups: April and May

A number of neighborhood groups sponsor spring clean-ups. To find out if your neighborhood group is involved, contact Keep Lincoln and Lancaster County Beautiful at 441-8035.

Keep Wilderness Park Beautiful: 9 a.m. to noon, April 20

Show your concern for our earth by helping to clean up Lincoln's wildest park! Join Lincoln Parks and Recreation staff in picking up litter along trails and roads. Participants will meet at the park entrance at 1st Street and Park Boulevard. Free pizza and pop will be provided for those who pre-register before April 17. More information is available from the Parks and Recreation Department at 441-7895.

Spring Affair: April 20

This annual event is sponsored by the State Fair Park, the Nebraska State-wide Arboretum and UNL Landscape Services. Activities are scheduled from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Food Court Building and include a native and exotic plant sale, seminars on gardening, a variety of outdoor vendors and tips on gardening. For more information, call UNL Landscape Services at 472-2679.

32nd Annual Earth Day: April 20-21

The local observance of Earth Day will include activities

from 1 to 3 p.m. at the Lincoln Children's Museum, 1420 P Street on Sunday, April 21. Kids can create recycled paper and learn about recycled content products. Parents can register for a year's worth of curbside recycling services.

On April 20 and 21 people can participate in a free "earth day everyday" hike at the Pioneer Park Nature Center. The hikes begin at 2 p.m. each day and will be guided by a naturalist.

Cans for Books Campaign: April 1 through 30

During this time, area schools will receive five cents per pound for aluminum cans brought to A & J Recycling, 3400 N. 22 Street and A-Can Recycling, 3255 S. 10 Street. The can collection is being sponsored by A & J Recycling, A-Can Recycling, Lee Book Sellers, Midland Recycling, the Ventures in Partnership program and the Lincoln Public Schools Recycling and Media program. Those dropping off cans can designate which school library will receive their donations. The school and individual bringing in the most aluminum cans will win cash prizes from Midland Recycling. For more information, call Midland Recycling at 476-8502.

Arbor Day: April 26

Many activities are planned statewide for this observance, which was created by Nebraskan J. Sterling Morton (1832-1902).

Trapping and Shooting

Both trapping and shooting can be used to reduce local population levels, but rabbits can repopulate areas quickly.

Trapping: Usually most effective during the winter and early spring, when rabbits are food-stressed. Good cold weather baits include cabbage, ear corn, dried apple and dried alfalfa or clover. Warm weather baits include lettuce, apples, carrots and fresh flowers such as pansies or tulips.

Do not set cage traps where pets or children can harass trapped animals. Consider installing boards or one foot-high fences to help funnel rabbits into the traps. Approach a trapped rabbit slowly and quietly to avoid alarming and potentially injuring the animal. Cover the trap with a light blanket or tarp to help keep the animal quiet. Rabbits can be released safely in areas with suitable habitat where they are not likely to cause problems again.

Shooting: Always check local regulations BEFORE discharging a firearm.

Both cottontails and jackrab-

see RABBIT DAMAGE on page 11