

# Ant Identification: Why is it so Important?

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In the past few years, pest control professionals report that ants have risen to become the most problematic nuisance pests in and around homes. Ants motivate more homeowners to call cooperative extension than any other group of insects.

There are about a dozen ants that are found occasionally inside Nebraska homes. Because ants live in colonies and have a queen that continually lays eggs and produces more workers, the smartest control approach is to locate and treat the colony.

Spraying individual ants with a liquid or aerosol insecticide will only be a temporary solution.

Locating the colony isn't always easy. Most of the time ant colonies are outside and the ants you see are coming inside through small cracks that allow entry. But, sometimes the colony can actually be in the structure itself. A correct species identification will help you locate the colony, because different ant species are found in different locations and have different habits. They also may be attracted to different foods — which will be helpful when considering a bait treatment.

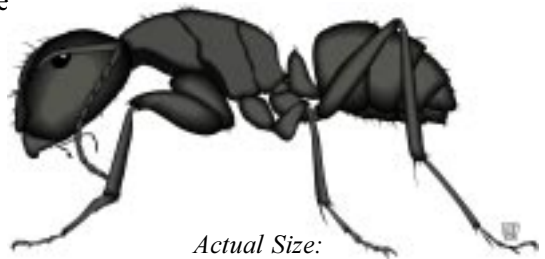
Several of the more common pest ants are carpenter ants, odorous house ants and large yellow ants (citronella ants). Each of these ants have one node separating the thorax and gaster, but they have other distinctive features that make them easy to identify.

## Carpenter Ants

Carpenter ant workers are dimorphic — which means you

can find large and small wingless workers in the same colony. In Nebraska, there are two species of carpenter ants that are quite different in color.

### Black Carpenter Ant—



Actual Size:



Major workers: about 7/16"



Minor workers: about 1/4"

Carpenter ants are large black ants, the workers range in size from 1/4-inch to 1/2-inch long. They have a dull black color, including legs and antenna. Under a hand lens you may see fine yellow hairs covering the abdomen.

### "Red" Carpenter Ant—



Actual Size:



Major workers: about 1/4"



Minor workers: about 3/16"

The "red" carpenter ants are smaller than the black carpenter ants and distinctly different in coloration: reddish head and thorax and black abdomen.

Colony location: The main carpenter ant colony must have a constant source of moisture to

survive and is usually located in dead wood outdoors, such as dead limbs, tree holes, stumps, landscape timbers. Indoors, a main colony is usually associated with a water problem.

Control: Locating the colony is essential to eliminating carpenter ants; the correct treatment is dependent on where the colony is located. Hiring a pest control professional may be needed to correctly treat in wall voids or other difficult locations.

## Odorous House Ants



Actual Size:



about 1/8"

These ants are small, very dark brown to black ants — about 1/8-inch long. They get their name from their distinctive coconut smell when you smash them. Odorous house ants commonly found in kitchens are especially fond of sweets.

Colony location: Odorous house ants nest in many different outdoor habitats and build shallow nests under items lying on the ground, including mulch and bark chips. Inside buildings, they can nest in wall voids—particularly around hot water pipes and heaters. As with other ant species, moisture is a limiting factor in their survival.

Control: If colonies are found, they can be treated with

insecticides — the type of treatment depends where the colony is located. Because this ant is attracted to sweet foods, a sweet bait (like Terro or Pic II) can often be successful in controlling this ant.

## Large Yellow Ants



Actual Size:



about 1/4"

This medium-sized ant is about 1/4-inch long and yellow-orange in color. They are also called citronella ants because when crushed, they give off a distinctive odor of lemons or citronella.

Colony location: The large yellow ant usually nests in the soil, often under logs, rocks, patio blocks and concrete slabs. They also may be found in open areas of soil. The large yellow

ant excavates large amounts of soil as it builds galleries. If the colony is located under a basement or garage slab, soil may be piled on the floor. Large yellow ants swarm nearly anytime — even in January — and often several times during the year. If large yellow ant

swarmers are found inside the house, the colonies are probably in the soil outside the foundation or under a crawl space.

Control: Locate and treat colonies next to, under or around the structure. It may be necessary to hire a pest control professional to treat under concrete slabs or in crawl spaces. Baits are not effective for large yellow ants.

There are eight other ant species that are sometimes found in Nebraska homes so don't assume these are the only ants you might encounter. It is always a good idea to have ants identified by an expert before you spend a lot of time or money on treatment. Bring ant specimens to the Lancaster County Extension Office, 8 a.m.–4:30 p.m. weekdays.



## Termite Control Workshop May 22

"Everything Homeowners Need to Know about Termites and Termite Control" will be held at the Lancaster Extension Education Center, 444 Cherrycreek Road on Thursday, May 22 from 6:30–9:30 p.m. Barb Ogg, Dennis Ferraro and Clyde Ogg will discuss all aspects of termite biology and management. The goal of this workshop is to help consumers make better decisions about termite control. Cost: \$20. (BPO)

## Clopyralid and Compost

Clopyralid (pronounced clo-PEER-a-lid) is a herbicide designed to kill broadleaf weeds such as clover, thistle and dandelion. Clopyralid is sold for use on turf by several manufacturers under a variety of trade names, such as Confront, Lantrel, Momentum and "Weed & Feed" fertilizers. The source of clopyralid in compost are clippings treated with these products.

Gardeners may inadvertently damage sensitive plants through misapplication of compost with clopyralid. Clopyralid is very slow to break down during the composting process. In soil, it has a half life of 2–14 months. When composted, the half life is greater than one year. Other chemicals appear to break down quickly in compost and do not present the same problems as clopyralid.

Plant families sensitive to clopyralid include:

- Legumes: peas, beans, lentils and clover
- Solanaceous: tomatoes, peppers, potatoes and eggplant
- Composite: sunflower, petunias, daisies and asters
- Other plants: carrots, carnations, lupines and lettuce

Exposure to clopyralid does not pose a health threat. According to the EPA, it is not harmful to people or animals at the low levels present in compost. In fact, people that have applied this herbicide to their lawns have a much higher concentrations of clopyralid than is in the compost. The primary environmental concern from this herbicide is its effect on sensitive plants.

Vegetables grown in soil treated with clopyralid-contaminated compost are safe to eat.

Plants damaged by clopyralid will show:

- Stunted growth: the main growth tip stops growing and the lateral buds begin to grow
- Reduced fruit set
- Cupping of leaves

- Failure of secondary leaves to grow after the seed leaves emerge
- In legumes, compound leaves stay single.

Compost is still great for your lawn, garden, and landscape. Compost builds healthy, biologically active soil, increases porosity and water-holding capacity of the soil and decreases bulk density of the soil.

When applying compost, thoroughly mix it with the top soil. Use compost at the recommended rates listed below:

- For a new lawn, spread one inch of compost and till into the top four to six inches of soil prior to seeding.
- For an established lawn, top dress with up to 1/4-inch of compost two to three times during the growing season. (Treat bare spots like new lawn)
- For flower and vegetable gardens, apply one inch of compost and till into six inches of soil. (DJ)

## Products Registered in Nebraska Containing Clopyralid

1. Accent Gold Herbicide
2. Andersons Golf Products Turf Fertilizer 18-5-9 with Millennium Ultra Herbicide
3. Award Professional Millennium Weed & Feed
4. Battleship Herbicide
5. Confront Herbicide
6. Curtail Herbicide
7. Curtail M
8. Dupont Accent Gold WDG Herbicide
9. Earl May Midwest Select Weed & Feed 32-3-5
10. Earl May Midwest Select Winter Weed & Feed 24-4-14
11. Greenview Preen 'N Green Lawns
12. Hornet
13. Hornet WDG
14. Howard Johnson's Weed & Feed with Millennium Ultra
15. Lawn Science 20-5-10 LS 621 Pro Series Millennium Ultra Weed & Feed
16. Lebanon Proscap Homogeneous Fertilizer w/Confront Herbicide 19-2-9
17. Lebanon Proscap Homogeneous Fertilizer w/Confront & Team 19-3-9
18. Lesco Momentum Premium Selective Herbicide
19. Lontrel Turf and Ornamental
20. Momentum Premium Weed & Feed
21. Redeem R&P
22. Stinger Herbicide
23. Strike 3 Ultra
24. Tee Time 18-5-9 with Millennium Ultra Herbicide
25. The Andersons Prof Turf Products 16-4-8 w/Millennium Ultra Herb & PCSCU
26. Transline (DJ)