

Clover Mites Invading Local Homes Already

Barb Ogg
UNL Extension Educator

With the recent warm sunny days, people are already reporting clover mite invasions. Watch for this tiny pest crawling in windows and doors, especially where the sun warms the house.

The clover mite is an eight-legged relative of spiders and ticks. It is slightly smaller than a pin head and has a reddish-brown body. They have an unusually long pair of front legs, which distinguishes them from other mites (see photo). They appear as brick-red specks crawling around windows, drapes, curtains and furniture.

Clover mites do no damage or injure humans. They are so tiny they come through tiny cracks accidentally. They cannot survive inside. Outdoors, they feed on turfgrass and other plants, but do not seem to cause any damage.

Management Strategies

Outdoors—Effective control means preventing entry into buildings in the spring or the fall. The best way



Clover mite adult and eggs (highly magnified view).

Jim Kellisch, UNL Department of Entomology

to prevent entry is to remove grasses and weeds in a three-foot strip around foundations, although mites may cross mulch and pea gravel to enter the home anyway.

A chemical barrier outside the home may help reduce or prevent infestations inside the home. Treat five to ten feet out from the base of the foundation and a few feet up on the walls. Successful chemical control requires a very thorough treatment and may need to be repeated because many products on the market registered for clover mite control

are short-lived. Treat when daytime temperatures will be at least 60 degrees F because chemical effectiveness may be reduced with cooler temperatures.

Indoors—Clover mites inside are best controlled with a vacuum cleaner. Avoid crushing or smearing the mites, especially on fabrics, because they may leave a red stain. It is not recommended to use chemicals indoors for clover mites. A vacuum cleaner works just as well and eliminates pesticide exposure.

Whitney Cranshaw, Colorado State University entomologist, suggests putting a fine layer of dust around windows, in cracks and other areas where clover mites may enter. Try using talc-containing baby powder, diatomaceous earth and even baking soda. The mites coated with the fine dust will die in the barrier.

Clover mites are so tiny they stick easily to almost any type of sticky tape. Place double-sided masking tape on window sills or other areas where mites are entering to catch the tiny mites as they cross the tape. When the tape becomes filled with mite bodies, simply peel it up, throw it away and replace, if needed.

Swarming Ants are Reproductives Ready to Start New Colonies

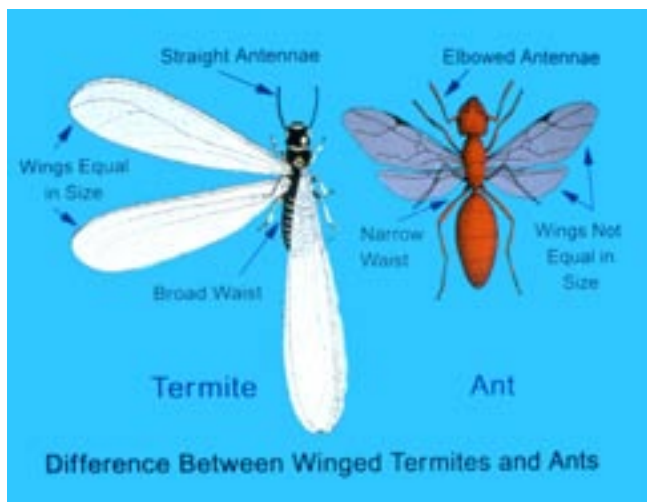
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Many people think all ants are wingless, but ant colonies eventually produce ants with wings. These are the reproductives—the queens and kings—that fly away to start new colonies.

Queens and kings do not keep their wings very long. After they have found a new colony location, they shed their wings.

Swarming occurs when colonies are mature and there is plenty of food so the colony can afford to put extra resources into swarmers. Most of the colony stays in the original location—only the swarmers leave.

Some ant species even swarm in the wintertime—usually when the ant colony is under the slab of a house or in



Winged ants differ from termites in type of antenna, shape of body and length of wings.

a warm location. In Nebraska, most ant colonies swarm during the spring and summer months.

Ant swarming is a natural phenomenon that occurs regularly, but most

people don't notice, unless it occurs under the basement slab or in the walls of the house. When this happens, it might be a good idea to have the ant species identified to make sure it isn't an ant species which damages wood, like carpenter ants.

Vacuuming swarmers is safer than using insecticides and just as effective. If they swarm inside the house, they die quickly, even if you don't do anything.

Sometimes people think swarming termites look like swarming ants. See figure at left to see how they are different.

Bring specimens to the UNL Extension in Lancaster County, 444 Cherrycreek Road, Suite A, for identification, between 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. weekdays.

Springtime Bird Frequently Asked Questions

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Q. Why are woodpeckers beating on my house?

A. In the spring, male woodpeckers mark their territory with a rhythmic pecking sequence, known as *drumming*. In addition to establishing territories, drumming also attracts female woodpeckers. Drumming is predominantly a springtime activity that will stop once nesting behaviors begin. Woodpeckers do not hurt themselves with this activity. Drumming seldom results in damage to wood or metal surfaces other than possible paint removal.

Woodpeckers can do more damage to wood-sided homes when they are feeding for insects or excavating nesting cavities. Exclusion methods are best because they are consistently effective.

Place lightweight, plastic bird-type netting or use metal sheathing over damaged areas.

Q. Grackles are putting droppings in my birdbath (swimming pool). Why?

A. After their young hatch, grackles become very tidy in order to prevent predators from finding the nest. Fecal matter from the young birds is covered with a sac-like membrane which enables the adults to dispose of the waste easily away from the nest. Birdbaths and swimming pools are an attractive disposal site because the water reduces the smell from the fecal matter.

Q. Blue jays and swallows have been attacking our cat and have even swooped down on us! Why are they doing this? How can we protect ourselves from these dive-

bombing birds?

A. Birds are very territorial when they have a nest of babies. When a cat, dog or human comes anywhere close to their nest, they see a predator that is a threat to their babies. This dive-bombing behavior is an effective scare tactic meant to drive predators away from their nest of young. Until the baby birds are on their own, you may want to stay away from the nest site. This may mean using other entrances around your house or areas in your yard. Dive-bombing is very effective, although the birds are unlikely to hurt you. Wearing a hat or carrying an open umbrella over your head may make you feel safer.

Q. Swallows have been trying to build a mud nest above our door. How do we discourage them?

A. Barn swallows tend to nest as single pairs and build a nest beneath an

Spring Turkey Hunting Workshop, March 23

A Spring Turkey Hunting workshop will be held Thursday, March 23, 6:30–9:30 p.m. at the Lancaster Extension Education Center, 444 Cherrycreek Road, Lincoln. If you are interested in hunting turkeys in the spring season, this is a workshop you can't miss.

Experts will share information about turkey biology, behavior and hunting tips that will make you more successful. Topics covered will include turkey calls, camouflage, using ground blinds, choosing the best shot load, field dressing, guns, safety and state regulations.

This free seminar is offered by Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, but seating will be limited, so **reservations are required**. Call 471-5558.

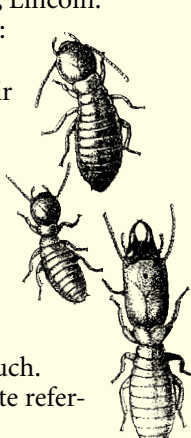
Everything Homeowners Need to Know About Termite Control Workshop, May 18

University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension will present a workshop, Everything Homeowners Need to Know About Termite Control, on Thursday, May 18, 6:30–9:30 p.m. at the Lancaster Extension Education Center, 444 Cherrycreek Road, Lincoln.

Attendees will:

- Learn to identify termites and their damage.
- Learn unbiased information about effective treatments, based on research results.
- Learn why treatments cost so much.
- Receive up-to-date reference materials.
- Be informed consumers and make better decisions.

Cost is \$25 and includes reference materials. Call 441-7180 for more information.



overhang. A covered porch is ideal. Four basic conditions are needed by nesting cliff and barn swallows:

- a fresh water source for drinking.
- an open habitat for foraging.
- a supply of mud of the proper consistency for nest building.
- a suitable surface for nest attachment beneath an overhang or ledge.

Assuming that nothing can be done about these first three conditions needed to nest, the best control tactic is altering the suitability of the attachment site. There are several ways this can be done (see figures 1 and 2 on page 11).

1) Removal of a rough surface of a wall and/or overhang makes a site less attractive for swallows. Wood, stucco, masonry and concrete surfaces are favorable surfaces for nest attachment. Nests are rarely attached to metal. Cover attachment surfaces with slick surfaces

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