

It's Springtime: Watch for Signs of Termites

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When you are doing chores around the house this spring, keep an eye out for signs of termites. Termite activity increases during the springtime as temperatures warm up.

Like all insects, termites are cold-blooded animals and activity slows greatly when temperatures are below 50 degrees F. Unless they enter a structure below the frost line, termites are less active during Nebraska winters. But, when temperatures warm up in the spring, hungry termites are looking for food—which could be your house. Be on the lookout for:

Mud tubes — To keep from becoming dehydrated, termites build and travel through mud tubes about the size of a pencil. If you break the tubes open, you may find light-colored worker termites. These innocent-looking insects are the ones that take small bites out of your house. Watch for mud tubes on the side of foundations, inside basement walls and where wood is close to the soil. Check for mud tubes if you are doing repair work;



Mud tube on a basement wall

homeowners sometime find mud tubes in wall voids while doing remodeling projects.

Swarming termites — In the spring, some of the termites in a healthy colony develop wings and fly off to start new colonies. Swarming termites are dark brown to black, have two pairs of nearly equal-sized wings and are weak flyers. Termites swarming in the house is a cause for real concern because it means worker termites have found a way into the house.

Damaged wood — Termite damage is often hidden because termites prefer to stay inside the wood or wall void. Damaged wood can often be penetrated with a screwdriver or an ice pick, revealing mud tubes lining the damaged wood. Tapping damaged wood with the handle of a screwdriver may produce a "hollow" sound.



Dead swarming termites in a window sill

Pinholes in drywall or wallpaper — Termites in the wall void sometimes chew through drywall to search for new sources of wood. When they reach the light and dry air, they stop and plug the tiny hole with mud.

Places to particularly look for termite activity include wooden constructions in basement and crawl spaces, wood sills, joists, support posts, basement window frames.

What should you do if you find termite activity? DO NOT PANIC! Termites damage wood slowly; it takes from three to eight years for significant damage to result from a termite infestation in Nebraska.

Many people want to treat the termite infestation themselves to save money. But, because of the expertise needed to treat properly, homeowners

should work with a termite control professional.

Do not be pressured into making a quick decision about purchasing a termite control

service; the time spent gathering information can save you hundreds, even thousands of dollars and will help you make more informed decisions.

Termite Workshops for Homeowners in May

To become more informed about termites, attend a workshop, "Everything Homeowners Need to Know about Termites and Termite Control." University Extension Educators, Barb Ogg, Dennis Ferraro and Pesticide Education Specialist, Clyde Ogg, will discuss termite biology and behavior, home inspection tips, differences between barrier and bait treatments and how treatments should be done for best termite control. Tim Creger, pesticide program manager of the Nebraska Department of Agriculture will discuss why it is important for homeowners to read and understand termiticide labels.

This workshop will be held at the following Nebraska locations:

- May 3—Omaha, Douglas-Sarpy Counties Central Office; 8015 W. Center; 6:30–9:30 p.m.
- May 15—Weeping Water, Cass County Extension Office, 8400 144th Street, located on the Cass County Fairgrounds, 6:30–9:30 p.m.
- May 17—Lincoln, Lancaster Extension Education Center, 444 Cherrycreek Road 6:30–9:30 p.m.

There is a \$25 registration fee for this workshop. In addition to training, participants will receive up-to-date reference materials.

What's Bugging You?

When temperatures warm up, insects become active. The extension office often gets calls about these insect and wildlife problems in April:

- Winged termites
- Winged ants and nuisance ants foraging for food
- Clover mites
- Sac spiders
- Oriental cockroaches
- Ticks
- Rabbits
- Nesting birds



Trail of ants on kitchen sink



Sac spider



Clover mites



Oriental cockroach

FOR MORE INFORMATION
Go to <http://lanaster.unl.edu/pest/resources> for information about any of these pests. You may bring specimens for identification and control recommendations to UNL Extension in Lancaster County, 444 Cherrycreek Road, Lincoln during office hours, Monday–Friday, 8 a.m.–4:30 p.m.

Tips to Encourage Nesting Birds

- Think about the birds most likely to visit your backyard and determine the need for an appropriate nest box or platform.
- Houses mounted on metal poles are less vulnerable to predators than those mounted to a wooden post or tree.
- In the spring, hang a wire cage filled with natural fibers, twigs, wool, string or feathers for birds such as black-capped chickadees, robins, phoebes, barn swallows, tree swallows and house wrens to use as nesting material.
- Bird baths and fruit-bearing shrubs are attractive to many bird species.
- Secure houses and shelves tightly to the support post to withstand wind and climbing predators.
- Some cavity-nesting birds forage in trees and require trees as part of their habitat. Examples include black-capped chickadees, downy woodpeckers, white breasted nuthatches and house wrens. Bird houses for these species are more attractive and successful when appropriate tree and shrub habitat is nearby. In contrast, purple martins forage on the wing and require open areas. Bluebirds perch in trees but forage for insects in open areas; their boxes should be located in the open away from woods.
- Leave snags standing as natural bird houses or, if desired for safety, cut them about 15 feet above the ground.

Source: *NebGuide G1427 "Backyard Wildlife: Bird Houses and Shelves"* which is available at the extension office and online at <http://lanaster.unl.edu>

Spring Cleaning? Take Advantage of Household Hazardous Waste Collections

Saturday, April 21, 9 a.m.–1 p.m.
State Fair Park, 4-H Youth Complex

Saturday, May 19, 9 a.m.–1 p.m.
Pfizer Inc., 601 W. Cornhusker
includes Latex Paint Exchange

Friday, June 22, 9 a.m.–1 p.m.
Union College Parking Lot, 52 & Cooper Streets

Saturday, June 23, 9 a.m.–1 p.m.
NE Wesleyan University, parking lot, 56 & Huntington Streets

Some items you can bring for disposal:

Thermometers, thermostats containing mercury, solvents, oil-based paint, paint thinner, pesticides, (even banned products like DDT), items containing PCB's (ballasts from fluorescent fixtures and capacitors from old appliances).

On May 19 only, you may bring latex paint for the paint exchange. Do not bring asbestos, tires, batteries, used oil, medicines, fertilizers, explosives and ammunition.

These collections are for household only; not for businesses. Only residents of Lincoln and Lancaster County can bring items to collections.

Still unsure what you have will be acceptable? Call the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department at 441-8040.