

It's Spring: Watch for Signs of Termites

Barb Ogg
UNL Extension Educator

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.

Be on the lookout for:

• **Swarming termites.** In the spring, some of the termites are winged and fly off to start new colonies. These termites are called swarmers. Swarming termites are dark brown to black, have two pairs of nearly equal-sized wings and are weak flyers. You should be concerned about termites swarming in the house because it usually means worker termites have found a way into the house.



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- **Mud tubes.** 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 inside. 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. Homeowners sometimes find mud tubes in wall voids while doing remodeling projects.
- **Termite damage is often hidden** because termites like to stay inside the wood or wall void. Tapping damaged wood with the handle of a screwdriver may produce a "hollow" sound.

• **Pinholes in drywall or wallpaper** are signs of termites. Termites 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 and 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 would like 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.

Don't 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.

To become more informed about termites, come to a workshop, "Everything Homeowners Need to Know about Termites and Termite Control" (details at right).

Everything Homeowners Need to Know About Termite Control



Thursday, May 8
6:30–9:30 p.m.

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.

Presenters include:

- Barb Ogg, Clyde Ogg and Dennis Ferraro, University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension
- Tim Creger, Nebraska Department of Agriculture

Cost: \$25

Please preregister by calling 441-7180.

For other locations and dates, go to <http://lancaster.unl.edu/pest>



Dead termite swarmers in a window sill.

Reduce Your Risk of Rabies Exposure

Soni Cochran
UNL Extension Associate

Rabies is a deadly virus infection that can attack the central nervous system of most warm blooded animals, including humans. In Nebraska, striped skunks and bats are the primary reservoir for rabies.

The striped skunk (*Mephitis mephitis*) is frequently the source of rabies exposure to domestic livestock and pets and accounted for 70 percent of the Nebraska positive rabies diagnosis during 2001–2003. Skunks can carry the rabies virus for long periods without showing signs of the disease. Because skunks are highly susceptible to rabies, any skunk should be considered a possible source of the virus.

Brown bat bites are also an important source of human exposure to rabies virus. Because bat bites are small and easy to overlook, finding a bat in a room with a sleeping person, the elderly or very young child or anyone unable to understand and communicate well, should be considered a potential bite exposure. A physician should be contacted

immediately.

Dogs, cats, cattle and horses have commonly been infected with rabies from wildlife and these domestic animals often serve as the source of rabies exposure to people. Often a single domestic animal becomes the source of exposure of rabies to multiple people.

How to Protect Yourself and Your Animals

- Vaccinate your pets against rabies. Not only does this protect your pet, but it protects you from being exposed to rabies through them.
- If your pets come into contact with a wild animal, wear plastic gloves before handling them and transporting to a veterinarian.
- Vaccinate your livestock. If you are in an area with a high skunk population, consider vaccinating cattle, horses and sheep. There are vaccines available.
- If pets or livestock are acting strange and drooling, they should be examined by a veterinarian. Don't put your bare hands in their mouths.
- Stay clear of stray animals and avoid wildlife that act abnormally; report

them to animal control authorities.

- Clean up piles of brush or debris that would provide attractive habitat for skunks and be careful not to attract them with food left out for pets.

What Should I Do If Bitten by an Animal?

1. Thoroughly wash the wound with soap and hot water.
2. Then positively identify the biting animal and confine it, IF you can do so safely.
3. Contact your physician immediately.

If the animal tests positive for rabies, or cannot be captured, then rabies post-exposure treatments may be necessary. Rabies in humans is fatal without treatment. Post-exposure treatment is very effective; however, the treatment must be administered before signs of rabies occur.

Source: "Rabies in Nebraska," NebFacts NF958, University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension.

FOR MORE INFORMATION
UNL Extension NebFacts "Rabies in Nebraska" NF958 (English) or NF958s (Spanish) available at the extension office and online at <http://lancaster.unl.edu/pest>

Rabies Symptoms

An animal with rabies usually exhibits abnormal behavior.

WILDLIFE — Usually observed acting uncharacteristically

- Nocturnal animals (skunk and raccoon) may be active in daytime.
- Animals may seem uncoordinated - walk in circles, stagger, compulsive actions.
- Act aggressively chase people and pets, act tame, sleepy or paralyzed.

DOGS AND CATS — develop progressive stages of abnormal behaviors

- Initially, the animal may seek solitude, as well as display other non-specific changes in behavior.
- The muscles of the throat become paralyzed preventing eating or drinking. Saliva may drool out of the mouth.
- Animals exhibiting the "furious" form of rabies may initially behave irritably and snap or bite at real or imaginary objects. Later, they may viciously and violently attack anything in their path. Dogs may run for miles, cats may leap up and violently attack unsuspecting people. In later stages, paralysis is observed, usually beginning with the rear legs and progressing toward the head.
- Some animals exhibit a "dumb" form of rabies. These animals appear drowsy with paralysis of the lower jaw, drooling and a tendency to snap at movement. They are insensitive to pain and eventually become comatose.

LIVESTOCK

- Horses and pigs may bite viciously at any moving object or show drowsiness and paralysis. Facial nerve paralysis in horses may resemble a stroke, with drooping eyelids, flaccid lips and drooling of saliva.
- Horses may show signs of colic and restless pacing.
- Animals may urinate frequently or exhibit frequent sexual excitement. Cattle may have persistent straining to the point of rectal prolapse.
- Cattle may butt any moving object and have an unusual pitch to their bellowing; drooling of saliva resembles the signs of a foreign object in throat.

Put Your Hummingbird Feeders Out Now

The ruby-throat hummingbird migration in Nebraska peaks about May 5–17 and Sept. 2–18, but northward migration may occur from April to June and southward flights from August.

Commercial nectar solutions for hummingbirds can be purchased or easily made by mixing one part granulated white sugar (common table variety) with four parts water. For example, mix 1/4 cup sugar with one cup water. Boil the water, dissolve the sugar, then allow to cool before filling the feeder. Do not add red food coloring.

Keep leftover portions refrigerated until needed. Change the mix every few days, more often in hot weather, and clean the feeder each time before refilling to prevent molds that can harm the birds.

—Soni Cochran, UNL Extension Associate

