

Don't panic.

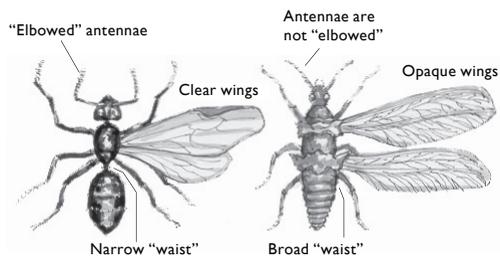
Carpenter ants do not eat wood; termites do. These ants eat insects and the honeydew excreted by aphids and other sap-feeding insects.

Carpenter ants excavate nesting galleries in moist or water-damaged wood, sometimes within a wall cavity. Finding a few ants does not always mean there is an infestation. Early spring, before their regular food is available, worker ants often wander inside homes looking for sweets, fats, and other foods.

Most carpenter ant damage occurs during the growing season. Large numbers of ants can be destructive, yet many times they are more of a nuisance than a serious threat.

What to do now:

1 Identify the insect (More details follow.)



Carpenter ant

Termite

2 Inspect your home for the ants and their sign

LIVE ANTS. Carpenter ants are nocturnal. They'll move in and out of your house at night to feed. So go outside at night and use a flashlight (preferably with a red cellophane filter over the glass) to search for ants moving

in the same general path (foraging trail). Check the foundation, stairs, deck, porch, landscaping timbers, utility wires, and branches of trees and shrubs that touch the house.

SAWDUST. Look for small piles of sawdust inside your home. Check corners near walls, inside walls from attic to basement, windows, skylights. (Termites do not leave sawdust behind.)

NOISE. Listen for the sounds of their activity in the walls. You can hear them chewing.

NESTS. Search for their nests in wall voids beneath window sills, inside doors, and under fiberglass insulation. Check hollow staircase railings, even inside wooden curtain rods.

The ants first create a main colony (nest). As their population grows, carpenter ants form satellite nests, which may be inside or outside. Outdoor nests are usually near the house. Look along the chimney where it joins the house, especially if the chimney is covered with ivy.

DEBRIS. Try to find distinct piles of debris that contain insect parts and pieces of pupal cases discarded by worker ants. Look under sills and insulation and near openings in secluded walls (cupboards, closets).

WINGED ADULTS. During the winter and early spring, look for winged adults inside, near windows. If you find any winged adults, that means there is a nest indoors because carpenter ants are generally found no more than 30 feet from their nest. They would not normally emerge during the winter if the nest is outdoors.

TRAILS. Look for live ants outside during the day. Ants avoid sunlight, so search the shady sides of linear objects (garden hoses, picket fences,

under logs). Also check branches that touch the ground. Follow their trails inside, along pipes and electrical wires. Carpenter ants sometimes follow straight routes and leave scent trails.

3 Use IPM to rid your home of carpenter ants

FIND THE SOURCE.

Locate the nest. Vacuum it, and destroy the vacuumed debris. Nearly all carpenter ant damage inside houses is caused by their nesting activity, which involves a few dozen to thousands of ants. You may need professional help for this step.

KEEP THEM OUT.

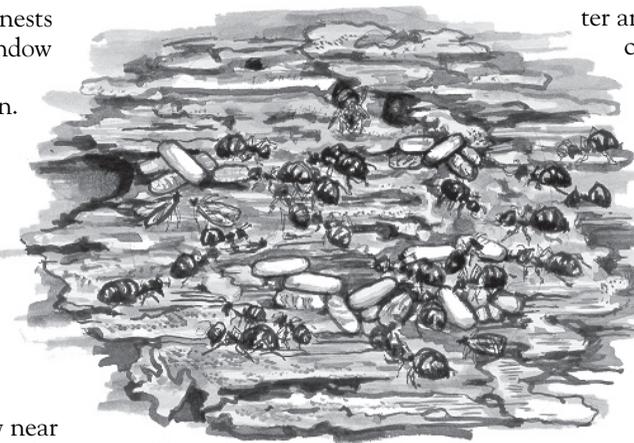
To keep ants from climbing onto your house, prune nearby tree limbs, bushes, and other plants. Leave a 2-ft. strip of gravel around the house to allow for inspection.

Store firewood away from the house, preferably off the ground. Firewood serves as a nesting place. Seal cracks and pipe and electrical chases with caulk or use sticky barriers.

REDUCE MOISTURE.

Eliminate excess moisture and wet wood to make the environment less hospitable to ants. They seek water-damaged wood because it is easier to excavate than sound wood. Furthermore, immature ants require high humidity for their development. So don't place wood in contact with the soil. Use a water-proofing compound where wood is in contact with concrete or asphalt.

Fix leaks in the roof, pipes, and sinks. Insulate sweating pipes. Clean gutters regularly; adjust drainspouts so that water flows away from building. And promote ventilation. Use vapor barriers when insulating outside walls.



USE A LEAST HAZARDOUS INSECTICIDE

Place a bait.

Purchase a containerized or liquid insecticide bait made for carpenter ants. Ant baits contain low-toxic insecticides that are more specific than traditional chemical controls. The "dual ant bait" provides ants with a choice of both sweet and greasy, which they may find more attractive. Oddly enough, the first sign that the bait is working is an increase in the number of ants. The entire population should decrease eventually.

To increase the effectiveness of the bait

- Place containerized bait near ant trails and liquid in cracks and wall voids where ants have been seen.
- Remove sweets or grease that might distract the ants.
- Don't kill any ants, because they must bring the bait back to the colony.
- Don't spray any insecticides. Doing so could make the bait ineffective or kill the worker ants that must transport the bait.
- Be patient. Baits may take up to 60 days to eliminate a colony. Replace the bait if it's depleted and ants are still present.

Use other low-toxic insecticides.

If you have followed the previous suggestions and still have a carpenter ant problem, you might obtain one of the following registered pesticides from a garden supply store. (These should not be used with baits.)

- diatomaceous earth (a desiccant, which dries up the insect; it's made of finely ground microorganisms)
- pyrethrum product (a chrysanthemum derivative)
- silica aerogel (also a desiccant, sold in combination with pyrethrum)
- a commercial product containing boric acid (an effective insect stomach poison and desiccant that has low toxicity to humans).

Some of these products would be introduced into crevices or wall voids. Always read the label for specific directions.

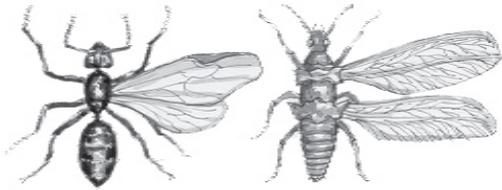
Carpenter ant or not?

The black carpenter ant (*Camponotus pennsylvanicus*) is often the species that damages houses in the Northeast.

It has a single node (waist segment) and is 1/4- to more than 1/2-inch long. It does not have a stinger, but it can bite. If you need more help identifying the insect, consult Cornell Cooperative Extension.

Carpenter ant

Termite



	Carpenter ant	Termite
Waist	Pinched, narrow	Thick
Antennae	Bent elbow	Straight
Wings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear • Top pair is larger than bottom • No piles of wings can be found after swarming • Workers are wingless 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opaque (milky) • Both pairs are similar size • Piles of wings can be found after swarming
Look for...	Small piles of sawdust (from their tunneling)	No sawdust piles. Termites eat the wood.

Ants are social insects, living in groups called colonies. They undergo complete metamorphosis, developing from egg to larva to pupa to adult. Colony members can be separated into groups called “castes” by the roles that they play in the colony’s survival, such as reproductive or worker.

The reproductives consist of the queens and the male ants. The male ants fertilize the queens during the ants’ nuptial flight, then die. The new queen finds a secluded site, chews off her wings, and starts to build a colony. The queen cares for her first group of offspring through the egg, larval, and pupal stages by herself. After the members of this group have changed into worker adults, they take on the care of the young. The queen’s job then becomes laying eggs and regulating the activities of the colony. The queen and colony may survive for 10-15 years, producing hundreds of thousands of offspring.

The carpenter ant colony may be located outside of the house in a tree stump or in a hollow of a living tree. It could also be located in your house.

The worker caste ants are devoted to a variety of activities such as nest construction, repair and defense, finding food, and feeding and caring for the eggs, young, and the queen. Workers may vary in size and appearance within a species, so size is usually not a good characteristic for identification. They live for approximately one year.

When the colony has matured, carpenter ants establish new colonies by producing swarms of winged male and female reproductives. Many people first become aware that they have ants when the ants initiate the reproductive flight.



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References and further reading

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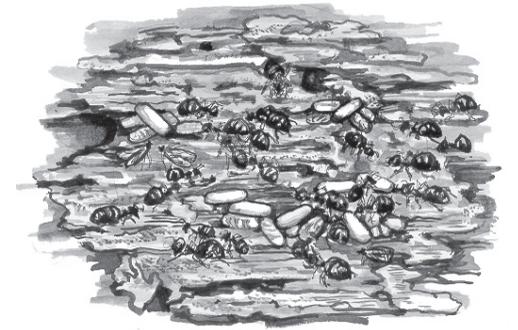
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Carpenter ants “renovating” your home?



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