COMMON ANTS IN ONTARIO
(Homoptera: Formicidae)

Ants are social insects that live in colonies or nests and have three distinct social castes consisting of queens, males, and workers. Of the approximately 100 species of ants found in Canada, most build nests in soil, however, some nest beneath concrete slabs, near foundations, under rocks or in wood. Food sources include sweet exudations of plants or insects, fruits, vegetables and almost anything consumed by human beings. Ants are also useful scavengers of insects and organic matter. Frequently ants become established indoors and become pests.

Life History

All ants undergo complete metamorphosis, which means that eggs, larvae, pupae and adults are present in the colony. Ant colonies have complex labour divisions and social functions among workers, males and queens. All ants have three body segments: a head, thorax, and abdomen (also called a gaster). The thorax and abdomen are joined by a thin pedicel, on which either one or two nodes protrude. The number of nodes is a major feature when identifying the ant species involved.

Before any ant control can be attempted, the correct species of ant must be determined. Knowledge of the habits, preferred nesting sites, and food preference will assist in obtaining satisfactory control of pest species.

Determining Degree of Infestation

The first step in controlling ants is to find the nest, if possible. If the ants are in the house, make note of the routes they use as they move into or through the house. This will enable you to determine whether the nests are inside the house or outside. For example, pavement ants, the most common indoor ant pest, may actually be nesting beneath the basement slab. Some ant species such as pharaoh and thief ants may require treatment without actually finding the nest due to the inaccessibility of their nests. These ants readily accept toxic baits.

Pharaoh Ants and Little Black Ants

Biology

The pharaoh ant, Monomorium pharaonis, and the little black ant, M. minimum, are small ants with workers ranging in size from 1.2 to 2.0 mm. They vary in colour from yellow-red (pharaoh ants) to black (little black ants), and have 3-segmented antennal clubs. These ant species nest in soil or buildings, and are common in households where they feed on a variety of domestic food, especially fats. They are also known to be predaceous on a wide variety of insects. Damage is caused by chewing insulation of electrical cables and cutting holes in fabrics and rubber goods during nest building. They also inflict a painful sting.

Control
The pharaoh ant is the most difficult ant to control because of its persistence and tendency to nest in odd places. Please contact your local garden centre for product advice. Be sure to follow the label instructions.

**Foundation Ants**

*Biography*

Several species of *Acanthomyops* sp. occur in Ontario. The workers are 3.0 to 4.5 mm long and medium red-brown in colour. These ants occur in leaf litter or underground where they tend aphids and mealybugs, and are therefore seldom seen. Prior to the winter months, entire colonies frequently move to house foundations to overwinter, and may enter houses through cracks and crevices. They do not move through the house, but occasionally carry soil into the house, and their presence may cause some concern. If the colony is disturbed, the ants emit a strong citronella-like odour. In spring, the ants will move back outdoors.

*Control*

Treatment of house foundations with insecticide is not usually necessary, since these ants are not very destructive. Repair any cracks or loose bricks in the foundation of the building and spot treat indoors if necessary.

**Cornfield Ants**

*Biography*

Several species of ants in the genus *Lasius* occur in Ontario. They most commonly occur in fields and gardens. The workers are dark brown and range in size from 2.0 to 4.0 mm. They actively search for food above ground and are often found indoors feeding on sweets and meats. They make large nests in the soil, often under objects on the ground. Cornfield ants, *L. alienus*, are often found tending aphids on corn and other grasses.

*Control*

These ants are common in lawns and wooded areas. Treat the entire lawns or areas where nests are located. Spot treat for indoor problems.

**Field Ants**

*Biography*

The largest genus of ants in Ontario is *Formica*, represented by seven species groups. Workers are brown, black, red or various combinations of these colours and range in length from 2.5 to 6.0 mm. These ants construct their nests in the soil. Some are scavengers or predators of other insects, while others are nectar feeders. Occasionally single ants move indoors.

*Control*

These ants primarily occur outdoors. Treat trails along house foundations. Nests may occur some distance from the infested structures.
Acrobat Ants

Biology

Two different species in the genus *Crematogastor* occur in Ontario. They can be recognized by their broad head and wide, heart-shaped abdomen. The workers range in size from 2.5 to 4.0 mm. These ants nest under stones, in wooden stumps or logs, or under other objects on the ground. They are general foragers and are commonly found in the garden and household. In the garden they tend aphids but indoors they will feed on domestic foods.

Control

Baits of sweet syrups or dried meats may help locate nests. Treat nests and house foundations if necessary. Remove tree branches that are in contact with the house since ants often travel along branches and enter through holes in the roof. Indoors, treat doorframes, window frames, and damp wood or previously infested wood.

Non-Chemical Controls

- Sanitation will help to prevent ant infestations. Store food in sealed containers and clean up crumbs and spills immediately.

- Use flashing under doors and caulk cracks and crevices around windows and house foundations. Improve the screening on windows and doors to prevent entry by ants.

Chemical Controls

- Non-toxic baits are used to attract ants so that their trails can be followed to the nest. Baits can also be used to help identify some species of ants since not all species have a preference for sweet materials.

- Toxic fast-acting baits have been used to quickly kill foraging workers. Other poisonous baits are slower to kill but foraging workers take them back to the nest for consumption.

Please contact a local garden centre for product advice. **FOLLOW ALL LABEL INSTRUCTIONS** regarding rates, methods, frequency of application, and safety precautions.

W.A. Attwater