



PEST MANAGEMENT



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MAY/JUNE 2017

The Pest Bulletin

Termites: Arch Enemies of Wood

With proper care, the wood in your home can last for centuries. But termites, and their accomplice, decay fungi, can consume and destroy wood in a relatively short time.

Wood may seem like an unappealing food, and it is for the vast majority of insects that are unable to digest wood cellulose and extract any nutrients from it. But termites have overcome this problem and eat wood voraciously. Living in their guts are certain tiny protozoa microorganisms that digest



the tough wood cellulose for them. This gives termites the unusual—and devastating for wooden structures—ability to consume wood as food.

Once a termite colony finds a good supply of wood, it multiplies and grows until it destroys the structural strength of the wood—unless the termites are stopped.

Only part of the damage done by termites is from what they eat. Termites carry with them the spores of wood-decaying fungi, and these start growing in the termite tunnels. The fungi get their

nutrition from the wood, and as they grow and spread they soften and weaken the wood even further.

Our homes and other buildings, as well as fences, porches, and outdoor structures, are ideal for termites because they concentrate so much wood in a small area. If these structures are not protected from termites, it's like offering them a free meal.

That's why it's so important to have us professionally inspect your home and protect it from these wood-eating pests with voracious appetites.

Carpenter Ants Are Active

You would think with a name like 'carpenter' that these ants would do something constructive. Actually, by nature they are destructive rather than constructive. In forests this is good because they break down fallen trees and branches so the nutrients can be re-used. But you sure don't want them 'recycling' your home!

Unfortunately, each colony of carpenter ants often has several nest sites. They will have a main nest and they will also set up satellite nests both indoors and around a home. Colonies gradually enlarge these nests and start additional nesting sites.

Carpenter ants may nest in any protected spot, but they normally choose

to nest outdoors in damp or rotted wood, partly because soft wood is easier for them to excavate. Indoor nests are a little different—they may be anywhere construction has left a cavity. Carpenter ant nest-making activities can make a bad structural situation worse. For instance, when they get into an area where there is a roof leak, their tunneling causes far greater damage than just the leak would by itself.

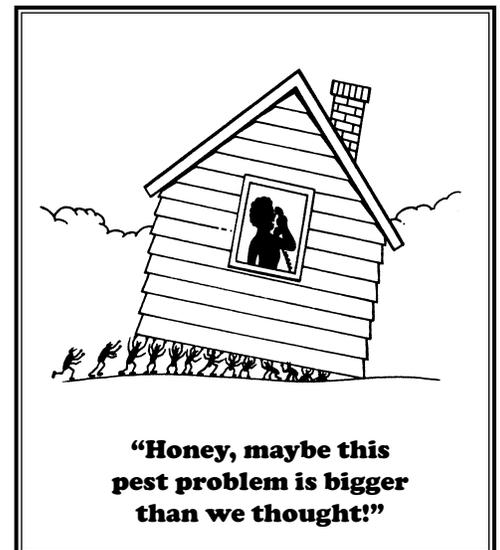
During the months ahead you may see either crawling ants or the winged swarming ants that start new colonies. Carpenter ants are generally most active at night, although you may see some during the day.

If you see ants, call us right away to schedule a professional inspection. In some cases we can apply a special perimeter treatment around your home to prevent them from getting in. If they are already nesting indoors, we need to eliminate those nests before the ants cause damage and spread.



Pest Prevention Tip of the Month

Remove bird nests from eaves and branches touching your home immediately after the young birds stop using the nests. Various blood-sucking and scavenging bugs live in these nests, and leave the nests when the birds leave. These pests sometimes crawl into homes from the abandoned nests.



What's That Bug in My Ear?

Another study has confirmed that cockroaches, not earwigs, are by far the most common insects that enter people's ears, according to the records of physicians who have extracted insects from people's ears.



The report, in the *South African Medical Journal*, studied insects removed from ears by South African hospital physicians over a two year period. Almost half of all insects removed from ears were cockroaches, followed by flies, beetles, moths, and a tick. Cockroaches usually enter people's ears at night as they sleep. More cockroaches were removed from the ears of children than adults.

These findings are similar to a 1998 study in a Los Angeles hospital, which found that over 3/4 of all insects removed from ears at the hospital were cockroaches.

The Smell of Odorous House Ants

Odorous house ants are a common household ant throughout most of the U.S. They can easily be mistaken for other ants, except for their distinctive odor when crushed. The odor is often described on the internet as rotten coconuts or just coconuts, but various websites describe the ants as smelling like



blue cheese, rancid butter, cleaner spray, and other scents.

So what do the ants *really* smell like? Recent tests were conducted that asked people to sniff and describe the ant's smell. *Blue cheese* was the most common scent chosen, with rotten coconuts the next most common choice.

Chemical analysis confirms the odor is closest to the smell of blue cheese. The distinctive scent of blue cheese is from the *Penicillium* mold in it. As coconuts start to rot, they too are colonized by *Penicillium* mold—which is why some people who are familiar with the scent of rotting coconuts identify that odor as how the ants smell.

Now you know what these ants really smell like, despite the variety of descriptions found on the internet!

Your Questions Answered

Q. Why do mosquito bites itch?

A. When a mosquito punctures your skin in search of a blood meal, she (only female mosquitoes bite—they need blood before they can produce a batch of eggs) also injects some saliva. The saliva contains several substances, including a very effective anticoagulant that prevents your blood from clotting while she sucks it up through a thin tube.



The first time we are bitten, nothing happens. But gradually our body becomes sensitized to the foreign proteins in the saliva and a small itchy red bump appears about 24 hours later. After many more bites, a pale, swollen hive or wheal appears minutes after the bite, in addition to the red bump 24 hours later. With repeated bites, some people stop reacting, and others become increasingly allergic and develop even larger bumps.

The bumps and itching are the result of our own immune system recognizing the saliva as a foreign substance and releasing histamine at the wound. It's actually our own histamine that makes us itch, not the mosquito's saliva.

Weird New Snake



One of the strangest snakes was described as a new species in 2006. The *spider-tailed viper* is from Iran.

This snake has a spider-like appendage on the end of its tail that it uses to lure in birds. The deadly viper lies perfectly still, well camouflaged among the rocks, just moving its tail end to simulate a spider walking about. It's just a matter of time before an unsuspecting bird flies in to grab what looks like a spider. When it does, the viper bites the unfortunate bird and holds it while its venom slowly kills it.

YouTube has a fascinating video of this snake luring in and grabbing a bird.

New Bee Drills into Sandstone



An amazing, newly discovered bee species bores into solid sandstone and lays its eggs in it. These bees do not live in colonies. They are solitary, although they may eventually build many tunnels near each other. The bee has been found in Utah, southwest Colorado, and the Death Valley area of California.

The bees use their very hard mandibles to chew through the stone. Many of the older female bees of this species have mandibles that show significant wear and tear. The young bees that emerge from the tunnels apparently come back and lay their eggs in the same tunnels, and expand them.

No one knows how long it takes these bees to burrow into sandstone, but once a tunnel is built, it is much more permanent than the tunnels of bees that nest in dirt. Besides permanence, the tunnels appear to have other advantages. The tunnels harbor fewer microbial parasites than those in dirt, and they protect the bees from occasional flash floods better than tunnels built in dirt.