

INTEGRATED PEST MANAGEMENT: ANTS



Columns of ants marching through our homes are a common problem in California. Many parents react by pulling out a can of ant spray to get rid of them, but there are risks to using these products—and, fortunately, there are safer and more effective ways of reducing the number of ants in our homes. Integrated pest management (IPM) is an approach to preventing ant invasions and reducing pesticide use through prevention, inspection, identification, monitoring and management of ants in your home.

Characteristics and habits

Ants are found where they can find food and water to take back to their nests. Most ants commonly found in California are not a serious threat to human health or property, and they may help control other pests like fleas, caterpillars and termites.

Managing ants in the home

Spraying pesticides may kill the ants you can see, but spraying is not an effective way to keep ants out of your home. More importantly, pesticide residues can build up in the dust on floors where people may be exposed. Young children are especially vulnerable because they spend a lot of time on the floor, where they may breathe or swallow these residues; pesticides can also be absorbed through the skin. There is increasing concern about the effects of these pesticides on the health and development of young children. Ant control should focus on good sanitation and home maintenance in order to prevent infestations and avoid routine spraying of pesticides.

Ant management requires continuous effort. The goal is to reduce the number of ants in your home. Do not try to completely eliminate ants from your yard – it is not necessary and may harm the environment.

IPM Strategies

1 KEEP ANTS OUT

- ▶ When you see ant trails in your home, follow ants to where they are entering your house. Caulk cracks around foundations or openings especially where wires and pipes enter the building.
- ▶ Keep plants and mulch away from the foundation of buildings; they provide nesting sites for ants.

2 REMOVE ANTS' FOOD

- ▶ Store food items such as sugar, syrup, honey and pet food in closed containers. Wash the outside of the container to remove sticky spills.
- ▶ Remove garbage from the kitchen at the end of each day.
- ▶ Repair leaky sinks and hoses.

3 GET RID OF ANTS INDOORS

- ▶ One or two wandering ants are scouts searching for new food or nesting sites and should be killed to prevent them from establishing a trail into the house.
- ▶ Sponging ants with soapy water removes the ants' scent trail and is effective in temporarily removing foraging ants in a building, especially if the area is thoroughly cleaned and any gaps or holes in the building are sealed.
- ▶ Ant baits are a key tool for managing ants and are the only type of pesticide recommended in most situations.
- ▶ Baits contain a slow acting poison mixed with a substance that attracts worker ants looking for food. Workers carry the bait back to the nest and transfer it mouth-to-mouth to other ants in order to kill the entire colony. This takes time, so be patient! Continue to clean up trails while waiting for baits to work.
- ▶ Use baits outdoors or in self-contained bait stations. Place where children do not have access to them, such as under a cabinet.

If you are unsuccessful in getting rid of indoor ants, work with a pest management professional who practices IPM to identify the ant species and create a management plan.



RESOURCES

University of California Statewide IPM—*Ants*
www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn7411.html

Department of Pesticide Regulation
“*Ant Bait and Wait*” poster
www.cdpr.ca.gov/docs/pestmgt/pubs/ant_color_eng.pdf

Department of Pesticide Regulation *Ant Fact Sheet*:
www.cdpr.ca.gov/docs/pestmgt/pubs/ants_color.pdf