

# LivingWithBugs Guide

## identification, life cycles and management

### Carpenter Ants

updated: 4/06

Carpenter ants (*Camponotus spp.*) can be a serious pest of structures. These large, powerful ants cause damage when they expand their nests in structural materials. While they normally nest in hollow trees, or other natural cavities, carpenter ants will build their nest in any cavity including ones they find in our houses like wall voids and subfloor spaces. Carpenter ants don't necessarily need wood, they will nest in any material in which they can construct a suitable cavity. For example, inert insulation is a favorite nest site for these ants.

Carpenter ants are large, up to 3/4" (19mm) but can be as small as 1/4" (6mm), generally black or black with reddish brown legs. At certain times of the year you'll find large winged ants (above). These are the reproductive queens.

**Colony Life Cycle.** Because ants only exist in colonies we refer to the "colony life cycle" rather than individual ant life cycle. Colonies begin when

a fertilized queen locates a suitable nesting site. This can be any protected cavity. The queen lays eggs which develop into sterile female workers (Fig. 2). These workers forage for food outside the colony and this is the key to control of carpenter ants (see below). Workers bring food (plant nectar, honeydew, carrion) back to the colony to support the queen and developing young. As the colony grows, work-

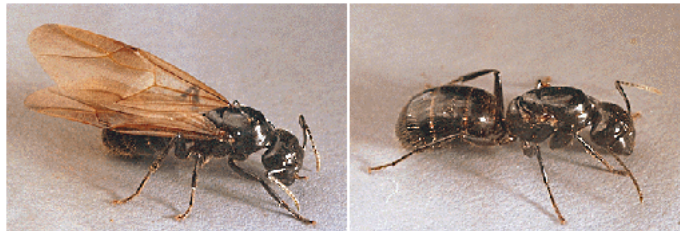


Figure 1. Winged (left) and wingless (right) carpenter ants.

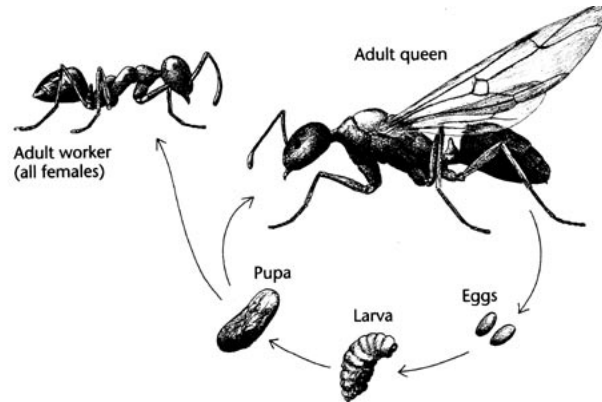


Figure 2. Carpenter ant life cycle.

ers excavate new gallery space. Over years, extensive damage to our buildings can occur (Fig. 3).

Colonies can exist for many years and may send out "satellite colonies". Satellite colonies lack a queen of their own and must maintain contact with the main colony.

**Colony Control.** You do not need to locate individual nests to get effective control. This is because

workers must leave the colony in order to forage outside for food. Ants leaving and entering a structure are a sure sign of infestation (see our Inspections article). By placing an insecticide barrier in the exterior wall voids, completely around the structure, these workers, and the colony they support, can be eliminated. Most homeowners should hire a pest control company to do these applications (see our

article about Selecting a Pest Control Company).

Baiting can augment or replace the traditional exterior wall void treatments described above. See our article about Using Baits for additional information.

**What To Do or Not Do.** Don't allow vegetation to grow against, or overhang, the building (Fig. 4). This vegetation can serve as both a pathway out of the building (to avoid treatments) and as a source of colony food in the form of small prey and honeydew. Cut vegetation back 12 - 18".

Do inspections at least once a year. More often if the house is 10 years old (or older), near a wooded area or has not had the wall void treatment in the last 5 years.

Routine maintenance treatments are not necessary. These treatments usually involve spraying insecticide around the foundation at 1 - 3 month intervals (sometimes yearly). Since the wall void treatments alone, done correctly, effectively control colonies, maintenance treatments offer no added value.

See [www.LivingWithBugs.com](http://www.LivingWithBugs.com) for additional information.



Figure 3. Side view of subfloor plank excavated by carpenter ants.



Figure 4. Vegetation allowed to grow too close to a building. May cause carpenter ant problems.