

ANTS

are pests around the home because they feed on and contaminate human foods, infest structures, and build unsightly mounds in lawns. In some cases, ants are able to inflict painful bites or stings. Ants do not attack or eat fabrics, leather or wood in houses; however, some species can establish nests in decaying wood in structures.

Several species of ants are found in or around houses in Florida. In general, the most common ants can be grouped as house-infesting ants, yard-infesting ants, and carpenter ants. The most commonly encountered pest ants are pharaoh, ghost, carpenter, native fire, imported fire, crazy, thief, acrobat ([Figure 1](#)), and big-headed ([Figure 2](#)) ants.



Figure 1. Acrobat ant.



Figure 2. Big-headed ant.

Identification

Ants can be recognized from other insects because they have a narrow waist with one or two joints (nodes) between the thorax and abdomen. Also, ants have elbowed antennae. Winged reproductives have four wings with the first pair being much larger in size than the hind pair.

Ants are frequently confused with termites. However, termites have a broad waist between the thorax and the abdomen. Termite reproductives have four wings of equal size.



Figure 3. Pharaoh ant.



Figure 4. Imported fire ant.



Figure 5. Ghost ant.



Figure 6. Argentine ant.

Food Preferences

Most ants eat a wide variety of foods, although some have specialized tastes. Fire ants feed on honeydew, sugars, proteins, oils, seeds, plants and insects. Pharaoh ants ([Figure 3](#)) feed on sugars, proteins, oils and insects. Crazy ants ([Figure 7](#)) like sugars, protein, and insects; carpenter ants prefer sugars and insects.



Figure 7. Crazy ant.

Ants use scouts to locate food. When a scouting ant finds promising food, she carries it or a piece of it back to the nest. Some ants leave scent trails that others can follow to the food source. Ants require water and will travel some distance for it if necessary. Workers are able to bring water to the colony in their guts.

Despite their name and where they are found, Florida carpenter ants ([Figure 8](#)) do not eat wood (as is the case with termites) but excavate galleries in it to rear their young. They feed on honeydew from sucking insects and household food scraps and do not damage sound wood to any extent.



Figure 8. Florida carpenter ant.



Figure 9. White-footed ant.

Prevention. Prevention is the best line of defense against the establishment of any pest insect. Relatively small ants, such as the white-footed ant ([Figure 9](#)) can fit through extremely small openings to gain access into the home. If these entry points can be located, they can be blocked by application of caulk or some other exclusion device. This can also help to prevent other insects from gaining access into your home.

The best approach to ant control in the home is cleanliness. Any type of food or food particles can attract and provide food for ants. Store food in tight containers. Remove plants that can attract ants or control aphids, whiteflies and other insects that produce honeydew. Reduce moisture sources, including condensation and leaks.