

# PestInfo



INTEGRATED PEST MANAGEMENT FOR CHILD CARE CENTERS

## SAFELY MANAGING AN ARGENTINE ANT INFESTATION

**WHAT KIND OF ANT IS IT?** Argentine ants are brown, slender, and about one-eighth-inch long (the length of a grain of rice). They usually nest under boards, stones, tree stumps, and potted plants. Look at the University of California Pest Note #7411 ([www.ipm.ucdavis.edu](http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu)) or take samples to your UC Cooperative Extension office (see county pages of your local phone directory).



### BIOLOGY AND BEHAVIOR

• Argentine ants are the most common ants in California. Their nests are believed to cover much of the state as one huge supercolony. It's impossible to totally get rid of them but you can reduce their numbers.

### CHECKLIST FOR MANAGING ANT INFESTATIONS

- ✓ Make sure you are dealing with Argentine ants by taking samples to your UC Cooperative Extension office.
- ✓ Check around buildings for ants. Look at plants that support honeydew-producing insects.
- ✓ Cleanliness is the main way to stop an ant infestation. Clean up food trash in activity rooms. Empty all garbage cans daily. Rinse recyclables before storing. Place outdoor garbage cans away from doorways. Use soapy water to clean up ant trails.
- ✓ Keep ants out by sealing cracks and holes around foundations with caulk or weather-stripping. Also seal around pipes and wires. Seal indoor cracks and crevices. Band the trunks of honeydew-covered trees and shrubs with sticky materials (like Tanglefoot®) so ants cannot reach their favorite food source.
- ✓ Communicate! Let teachers and other staff know what you're doing to manage pests.
- ✓ Teach staff how they can help keep ants out. Show them how they can make your treatment work better.
- ✓ Use least-hazardous chemical practices if you need them. Examples of this are bait stations and bait gels. Sprays kill only the few ants you see – you'll miss the millions living safely in out-of-the-way nests. It's important to use slow-acting baits that reach the queens and think about ant management as an area-wide project.

- Argentine ants get protein from eating insects, including many pests, but they usually like honeydew best. Honeydew is a sweet liquid made by aphids, scales, mealybugs and whiteflies. You'll often find these ants in trees and shrubs that are infested with honeydew-producing insects.
- Ants often come indoors to find food during summer and fall when honeydew production goes down.
- Ants feed each other by passing food from mouth to mouth. Slow-acting baits work better than sprays because ants out looking for food will live long enough to pass the poison to other workers and the queens.
- Colonies begin to get smaller soon after the bait kills the queens.
- You might need to use both sugary and protein-containing baits to manage Argentine ants. They prefer different foods at different times of the year.

### INSPECTION AND MONITORING

- Check your plants for aphid, scale, mealybug, and whitefly infestations, especially during the spring. Get rid of these honeydew-producing insects and you'll reduce the number of ants.
- Look for outdoor nests next to buildings, along sidewalks, around trees and shrubs. Also look under boards, stones and potted plants. Nests contain thousands of worker ants and several larger queens. The nest also has tiny eggs, little white larvae, and pupae that look like small grains of rice.

### WHAT IF YOU ONLY SEE A FEW ANTS?

You may not mind seeing ants outdoors, but even a few can be unpleasant in activity rooms, teachers' areas or kitchens. Often a few scout ants are looking for food or nesting sites. Within hours you may have a steady trail of ants streaming in. Vacuum and use soapy water to clean up trails—in a labeled spray bottle combine 1 tablespoon dish soap and 1 quart water. (Soapy water will get rid of the odor trail the scout ants left as a guide to those coming later.)

# WHAT YOU CAN DO TO MANAGE ANTS

## IN THE ACTIVITY ROOM

- Get rid of clutter.
- Keep activity rooms clean by allowing food and beverages only in chosen areas. Clean thoroughly.
- Take food out of cubbies every day.
- Keep any food, including pet food, stored in sealed containers.
- Take pets home during severe ant infestations.
- Clean up the teachers' area before heading home every day.
- Talk to cleaning staff about ant sightings or special cleanup.

## IN THE KITCHEN

- Store food in containers with tight lids made of plastic, glass, or metal.
- Keep indoor garbage in lined, covered containers and empty daily.
- Clean food spills promptly.
- Clean dirty dishes, utensils, and surfaces by the end of each day.
- Keep shelves in storage areas clean.
- Talk to property owner about fixing leaks. Talk to cleaning staff about emptying garbage at the end of every day and vacuuming up ant trails.

## CLEANING UP

- Vacuum up ant trails using a strong vacuum and wipe up with soapy water.
- Empty garbage at the end of every day from activity rooms and kitchens.
- Put outdoor garbage containers on hard, cleanable surfaces. Make sure they are at least 50 feet from building entrances.
- Wash all garbage containers regularly. Wash outdoor containers at least monthly. Keep the area around them clean.
- Pick up litter from grounds at least once a week.
- Have recyclables collected at least once a week.
- Clean floors and vacuum carpets daily in areas where food is served, and at least weekly in other areas.

## MAKING REPAIRS

- Seal cracks and crevices.
- Weatherstrip doors and windows.
- Fix leaky pipes under sinks.
- Put a sticky substance such as Tanglefoot® around trunks of trees and large shrubs infested with honeydew producers. Trim any branches that contact buildings.



## WHAT IS INTEGRATED PEST MANAGEMENT (IPM)?

Integrated pest management is a widely accepted approach toward pest management that results in effective suppression of pest populations while minimizing hazards to human health and environment.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

Visit DPR's child care IPM Web site at [www.cdpr.ca.gov/schoolipm/childcare/main.cfm](http://www.cdpr.ca.gov/schoolipm/childcare/main.cfm). For additional information about ants see the link to UC IPM's Pest Note #7411.

## CHEMICAL CONTROL OPTIONS *(Least-hazardous)*

**DUSTS**—Injected into wall voids and cracks and crevices. Active ingredients include boric acid, diatomaceous earth, and silica aerogel. The ants die by drying out.

**BAITS**—Active ingredients include abamectin, boric acid, fipronil, and hydramethylnon. Using aerosols or other sprays often decreases how well baits work. The ants you see wandering around are only the tip of the iceberg. If you kill these with a fast-acting spray, thousands more will soon replace them. This is why it's important to use slow-acting baits that reach the queens via mouth-to-mouth feeding of the workers. Think about management as an area-wide project.

**NOTE:** Baits are exempt from Healthy Schools Act (HSA) notification and posting requirements if confined in a self-contained trap (bait station), or formulated as gel or paste applied to cracks and crevices. Dusts and liquid insecticides are not exempt from Healthy Schools Act (HSA) requirements.

Written by Nita Davidson with assistance from Chris Geiger\*, Tom Babb, Lisa Ross, Nan Gorder, Sewell Simmons, Belinda Messenger, Madeline Brattesani, and Veda Federighi (DPR); Tanya Drlik (Marin County Model IPM Plan for Schools); Sherry Bryan (Ecology Action); Ingrid Carmean (Carmean Consulting); and Mike Rust (UC Riverside, Department of Entomology). Revised by Belinda Messenger. Image courtesy of Orkin, Inc.

\* now of the San Francisco Department of the Environment.

**Disclaimer:** Permission is granted to reprint and reproduce this document. Excerpts from this document may not be used in a manner that alters the originally intended meaning. The mention within this document of commercial products, their source, or their use is not to be construed as either an actual or implied endorsement. Mention is made of some representative active ingredients contained in pesticide products, but the Department of Pesticide Regulation does not recognize any product as superior to any other.



California Department of  
Pesticide Regulation  
1001 I Street  
Sacramento, CA 95814  
916-445-4300