

# 5 Most Common Ants in the Home

Dr. Jonathan L. Larson, Nebraska Extension Entomologist

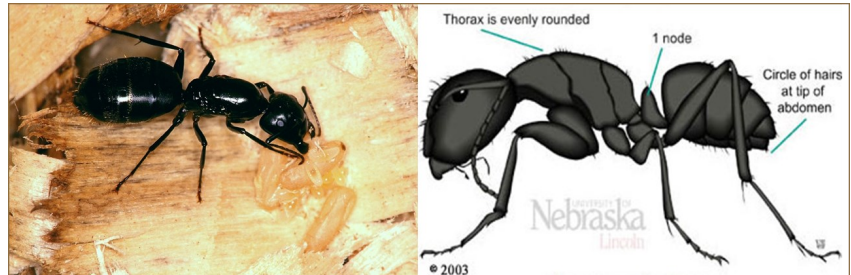
- Carpenter ants are between 3/8 and 1/2 inch long, most are dark black but some may be two toned mixes of black and red

- Carpenter ants will excavate moist wood for their nest, they do not actually consume wood like a termite does

- Nests in the home may be near leaks, behind dishwashers or near gutters (anywhere where moisture accumulates)

- Symptoms: Sawdust piles with dead insects mixed in, a crinkling noise in the wall, and workers in bathroom/kitchen

## 1. Carpenter ants



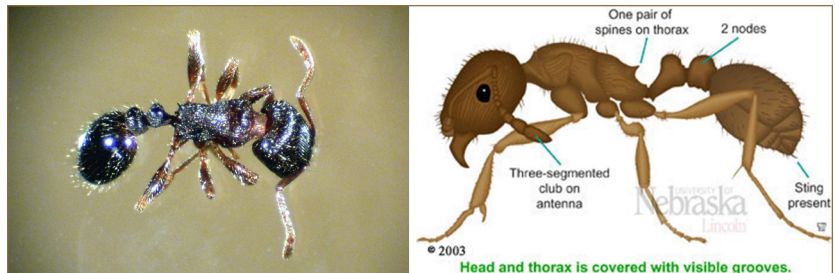
- Pavement ants are small, under 1/8th of an inch in length, and are brown to dark brown

- They have deep grooves in their exoskeleton that give them a “wrinkled” appearance

- Colonies are usually under pavement, concrete, slabs, and rocks but during swarming they can appear inside

- Symptoms: You may see swarming ants (ants with wings) or you may find piles of sand or gravel near foundations, between sidewalk slabs, or in cracks

## 2. Pavement ants



## 3. Odorous house ants

- Odorous house ants are small ants that measure between 1/16th and 1/8th of an inch in length, they are a dark brown

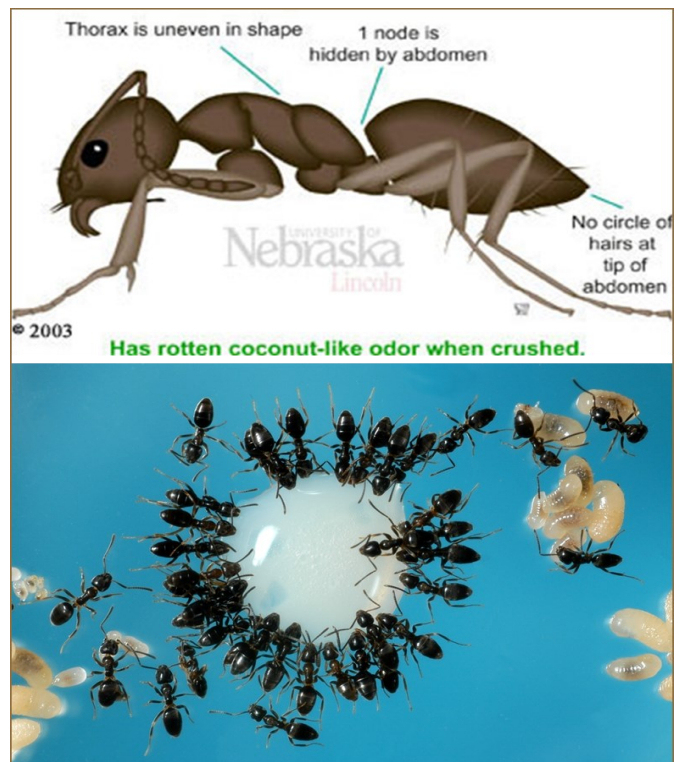
- They are known as the odorous house ant because if crushed they give off a strange smell

-Some describe this smell as rotten coconut like, others say it smells like blue cheese

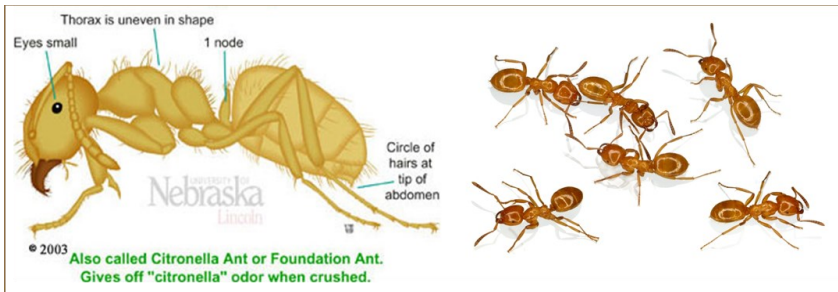
- Odorous house ants are extremely common, particularly in the spring when colonies begin searching for food

- The other common name for these ants is the sugar ant because of their sweet tooth, you can find them foraging for water, juice, and sugary crumbs inside the home

- Symptoms: People usually notice a long line of these small ants coming in under windows near sinks or counters



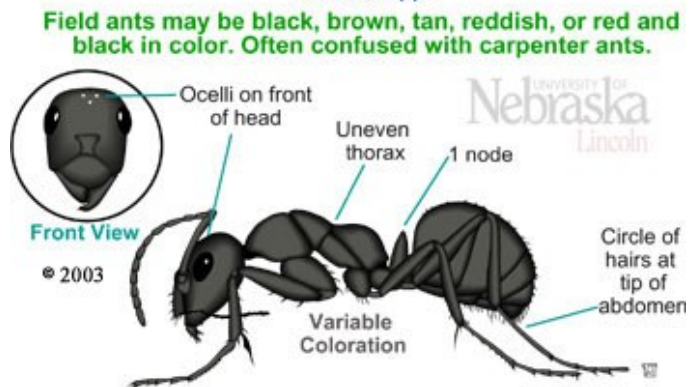
## 4. Citronella ants



- Measure about 1/4th of an inch and are a dull orange/yellow color and have noticeably small eyes
- When crushed they have a citrus or citronella like smell
- These ants have subterranean nests where they tend aphids and milk them for sugar water (like a dairy farmer and cow)
- Tend to go unnoticed until swarmers (winged ants) appear and end up in basements and garages

## 5. Field ants

- There are many types of field ants but they are usually near half an inch in length, they can be brown, black, red, or tan in color, they are often mistaken for carpenter ants
- While not often inside of homes they do build their homes near houses, gardens, fields, and in lawns. They construct large noticeable mounds of sand and soil
- Field ant mounds can dull mower blades and kill patches of turfgrass as well
- Field ants aren't all bad, they do help to control pests like grubs and caterpillars in your lawn and landscape



### How to best control ants in the home

When people find ants in their home they often just try to spray or kill the ones that they can observe. This is similar to treating a symptom rather than a disease itself. You can keep squishing or spritzing workers but there are still thousands more back at the nest ready to take their place. You will need a more integrated approach when dealing with pest ants.

Your first step should be to limit available food and water sources. This includes making sure food is sealed in containers and sanitizing food contact surfaces, floors, and dishes. After that you should make sure that entry points are minimized by sealing holes in caulk, ensuring windows fit snugly, and that doors meet door jams. If you have ant colonies outside that are foraging inside you can also use a perimeter spray of a liquid insecticide (an example would be Ortho Home Defense) to keep ants from entering the home.

Once you have minimized food sources for the ants you can use ant baits to control entire ant colonies, rather than just the worker ants you see. Commercially available ant baits (such as Combat and Terro amongst others) are collected by worker ants, taken back to the nest and then help to eliminate worker and reproductive ants at the source. You may have to try multiple baits to match up with your pest colony's food preferences and you will need to wait 10-14 days for complete control.

Of the above listed ants, both odorous house ants and carpenter ants can be difficult to control. Carpenter ants in particular aren't as attracted to baits and you may need to hire a professional pest control operator to come and locate their nest, drill a hole into the colony, and directly apply an insecticide to the nest.