



## ENVIRONMENT DIVISION

### PEST CONTROL SERVICE



## Black Ants



### *Characteristics*

This is one of the commonest British ants, found in almost all parts of the country. The worker is very dark brown, almost black in colour with a 'waist' which bears characteristic nodes or scales, and is about 3.4 and 5mm long. The queens are larger, which are never seen except as described later, and are around 15mm long, mid brown in colour and have a 'waist' of only one section.

### *Behaviour*

Few species, which nest outdoors, are likely to enter houses regularly except for the black ant. Ants are active insects, which nest outside in grass, walls and under paving. They will forage widely in search of food, which is how they come to enter domestic premises. The social habits of ants have created the development of a caste system where individuals are responsible for specialised duties within their community. The workers (sterile formates), and fertile males build and extend the nest, look after larval forms and forage for food whereby they become pests. The queens perform none of these duties, but remain exclusively within the nests.

During the summer months, great numbers of winged females (queens) and males are reared in the nest. Mating amongst sexual individuals takes place in flight. These swarms persist for 2-3 hours after which the males die, the females shed their wings and dig a cell in the soil where they hibernate. Some may find shelter in existing nests, but these will generally only tolerate one queen. Under favourable conditions the queen, and therefore her nest, may survive for several years.

These swarms may become a nuisance, but they are harmless, and nothing can be done about them. Sometimes the winged ants may swarm inside and in such instances, the problem may be overcome by the use of a flying insect aerosol spray.

### *Control Measures*

The pattern of a typical household ant infestation is shown in the diagram below.

**Use of insecticides outdoors.** Usually the nest will be situated under a path within 6m of the house. The precise location can often be discovered by following a trail of ants and if the nest can then be exposed, boiling water can be poured into it. Where there is risk that plants may be damaged by such treatment an insecticide dust or spray labelled for control of crawling insects, including ants, should be used. If the nest cannot be found, an insecticide dust or spray may be applied around doors and windows frames, ventilators and waste pipes to make a barrier to prevent entry into the premises.

**Use of insecticides indoors.** Where it is impracticable or impossible to prevent ants from entering, sprays, dusts or an aerosol suitable for the control of crawling insects may be used indoors. Application should be treated according to the label instructions. Particular attention should be given to small insignificant cracks, which may be major points of entry for ants.

## *Significance*

Foraging worker ants cause an annoyance as they search for food. Well-defined trails and clustering around the food source are a classic sign of ant activity. They tend to prefer sweet foods eg sugar. They are unpleasant and may damage food for human consumption, but they are not of any significance to public health.

In gardens their excavations around plant roots make soil excessively dry. They will also cultivate greenfly in order to obtain the sugary honeydew secretions that these aphids produce. They can also be beneficial as predators of other insects and scavengers.

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Revised: July 2009