

Carpenter Ants

Carpenter Ants are a re-occurring yearly problem for almost every property owner in the western New England area, and if unchecked they can actually do enough wood damage to make your home structurally unsafe to live in. We thought it might be helpful if we could give our clients a simple, no-nonsense overview of a variety of common questions and answers regarding this wood-destroying insect. For identification purposes, keep the following pictures in mind.



The above pictures show a carpenter ant queen, a side/head view of a worker, the five (5) primary carpenter ant castes (queen, male reproductive, minor worker, intermediate worker, and major worker), the core of a tree where the main nest might be located, and a $\frac{3}{4}$ side view of a major worker.

Q. What do carpenter ants eat?

A. Unlike termites, carpenter ants don't NOT eat wood. They are usually more interested in people and pet food as well as moisture sources like a sweating pipe and that's one reason why you often find them in kitchen and bathrooms. Outside, carpenter ants usually are found in trees and prefer the sweet "honeydew" secretions of aphids which they find on leaves. They will also eat the aphids, and the weak in their colony.

Q. Where do carpenter ants live? Do they live in my house?

A. Actually, carpenter ants can be found living in your building and also outdoors in a tree trunk or stump, which is most likely the "parent" colony. The ones living in your building probably have formed a "satellite" colony. Likely places to find carpenter ants in a building would be in wall voids around sinks, dishwashers, and entrance doorways as well as in the roof. They can also be found in exterior trim that is damp and slowly rotting, garage door casings, entry kick panels, and even in hollow decorative columns.

Q. Do carpenter ants have wings and are they large or small?

A. The answer is that carpenter ants can have wings, and body sizes can range from around $\frac{1}{4}$ " to perhaps over $\frac{3}{4}$ " long. Reproductive females (see picture above) are usually quite large, and their wings can have a reddish tint. Reproductive males are usually smaller and their wing color is not so pronounced.

Q. How much damage can carpenter ants do?

A. Carpenter ants can be fairly destructive if they are left unchecked. They can and will destroy the structural integrity of sills, studs, and headers... as well as door casings. They will also invade through the kick plate area under a door and damage the box band behind it.

Q. What are the consequences of putting off a carpenter ant treatment inside our building?

A. A good analogy would be to compare the problem to a dental situation. If you have a cavity you can get a filling and that should solve the problem. If you wait a year, chances are you will need a crown and the cost could escalate to 10 times the amount. Likewise, with carpenter ants you could wind up having to have major construction work on your property if you let them go unchecked.

Q. When do carpenter ants come into our homes?

A. Carpenter ants prefer to feed at night, and if you want to track them, put a few drops of honey on the shiny side of some scotch tape and stick it down in your kitchen. Wait until it's dark and they've had some time to discover the food, and then turn on the lights and follow them to where they are disappearing under the trim. Finding their nest areas is a major challenge.

Q. What is the best way to treat for carpenter ants?

A. American Exterminating treats each carpenter ant job a little differently, but generally speaking, our initial treatment is an Indoor/Outdoor treatment, which means we don't just spray the foundation of your building. We try to treat as much of the inside basement sill area as possible, and we also treat logical, known areas in a building that are conducive to carpenter ant activity. We always guarantee our carpenter ant treatments until the following March, something nobody else does.