

Eric's tips for tenants



Pest Control - Ants

Black ants are commonly found throughout the UK, and although they nest outdoors, they are often found inside houses, where they cause a nuisance rather than a health risk.

They are social creatures, and live in colonies containing workers (infertile females), males, queens and grubs (larvae). Ants mate on the wing, so the "flying ants" that you see in late summer are either males or immature queens.

Where do they come from?

You will find ants nests in dry earth around plant roots, with sandy soil in particular attracting colonies. The sand used in house foundations, garden paths and patios forms a good site for the queen ant to start a colony. Nests are increasingly being found inside the walls of properties (cavity walls, for example). Once a colony develops it can be difficult to get rid of.



Why do ants come indoors?



The ants found indoors are usually worker ants, which are foraging for food and water for the queen and the grubs. They have found that buildings inhabited by humans are a good source of food, particularly sweet or sugary items.

Do black ants just live on human food?

No, the worker ants are scavengers and collect seeds, nectar and even dead insects to take back to the nest. They also prey on greenfly, blackfly and other small insects, so they can do the gardener some good.

Do black ants do any harm?

Although it is unpleasant and a nuisance to find a large number of them in your home, black ants do not transmit any serious diseases. Do not leave food uncovered if accessible to ants, store food in clean closed containers. Store rubbish outdoors in sealed containers. Dispose of contaminated food in the dustbin, wrapped first to prevent it smelling in the warmer weather.



How do I get rid of them?

The cheapest, but not necessarily most successful, way of dealing with an ants' nest is to pour boiling water onto the nest. This will certainly control the problem, but may only be a temporary solution. If any ants are inside, wash them away with warm, soapy water. This removes the chemical trail and is as effective as most insecticides.

Another way of eliminating ants' nests is to buy a household insecticide that you should apply on and around the nest and possible entry points for the ants. Entry points would include doors, windows, cracks in walls, even wastepipes. Remember, for your own safety, to follow the manufacturers' instructions on the pack.

For an entire colony to be destroyed, ant poison must be slow-acting. Some of the chemicals that are effective as poisons are hydramethylyon, boric acid and fipronil. Poisons will work only if there is no other food source nearby.

Some products cause the workers to destroy their own nests. For example sugar based liquid bait containing borax. The workers are attracted to the bait and carry the insecticide back to the nest.

This again may only be a short-term answer, firstly because of the low dosages allowed in domestic insecticides. Secondly, there can be so many ants in one nest that it is difficult to eradicate the whole colony in one go, so the problem may recur.

For extreme ant infestations you may need to seek the help of a professional exterminator such as the Councils Pest Control Dept.