PERMA-CHINK® SYSTEMS, INC.

YOUR WOOD CARE RESOURCE

Carpenter Ants

If you live around trees or have decaying wood near your home, you probably have carpenter ants around your home. Carpenter ants are typically large ants, although the size of the workers can vary in a single colony. Periodically finding a few carpenter ants in your home is not necessarily a sign that you have an infestation. A good indication of a carpenter ant nest in your home is the presence of a pile of shredded wood (frass pile). Frass piles denote a nearby nest. Other signs of infestation are seeing a lot of red or black ants, faint rustling noises in your walls or inside woodwork, and the presence of large-winged ants.

Carpenter Ant

Carpenter Ant Damage

Carpenter ants do not consume wood. They get their name from hollowing out wood to make a suitable nest, generating a frass pile. In addition to wood, carpenter ants will nest in Styrofoam (EPS) panels and other types of insulation. Carpenter ants require water to survive, making moist wood around leaky pipes and drains an ideal environment for a nesting site.

A carpenter ant colony usually starts outdoors in a tree cavity. After a few years, the colony matures and expands forming satellite colonies by winged reproductives swarming in spring and early summer. New colonies can also form by moving closer to food locations. If suitable conditions are found within a home, satellite colonies can become established in your home.

Control of a carpenter ant infestation starts with a complete and thorough inspection. Useful inspection tools include a flashlight, a thin bladed screwdriver for probing the wood and a stethoscope, if you have one. Since carpenter ants are most active at night, the best time to perform an inspection is after dusk. Two things to keep in mind during your inspection, first find the voids and second follow the water. Although carpenter ants are usually found in wood, any dark, damp cavity can provide a suitable nesting site. A stethoscope makes it easier to hear their faint rustling sound. Tapping a suspected nest site excites the ants and you should be able to hear their movement. A moisture meter is a great tool to have for discovering potential carpenter ant nesting sites as well as finding decay prone areas. Some good moisture meters can be found on eBay or Amazon for less than $50. A moisture reading of over 20% is an indication of some type of water problem that needs to be corrected.

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Controlling Carpenter Ants

Correcting roof leaks, faulty plumbing and water penetration into log walls are the most important steps for long-term ant control. Even after the leaks have been repaired, enough moisture may remain to sustain a carpenter ant infestation for many months. The application of a contact pesticide directly to the nest is not the best way to control carpenter ants. Most contact pesticides are highly repellent which causes the ants to scatter. This creates the potential for additional satellite colonies to become established in other areas of the home. In addition, contact pesticides do not impart any long-term residual protection to the wood. After a few months the carpenter ants may return to the site of their original nest.

Close-up of Carpenter Ant Frass

A better way to control a carpenter ant infestation is to treat the infested area and those areas subject to infestations with a borate such as **Bora-Care®**, **PenaShield®**, or **Tim-Bor®**. They are all effective pesticides for preventing carpenter ant infestations. Tim-Bor® is best used as dust in wall voids and other areas as preventative measures. Along with the use of a borate you can use a granular bait such as Amdro Ant Block around your home.

Also, removing all wood debris near the house, keeping shrubs and tree branches from touching your house, and storing firewood away from the house will all help reduce infestation. Carpenter ants are not easily eliminated, and you may wish to call a professional in to take care of the problem.