

PHARAOH ANTS (*MONOMORIUM PHARAONIS*)



IDENTIFICATION

- Worker ants are monomorphic, but can vary in length from about 1.5-2mm.
- Colour varies from golden yellow to red, with black markings on the top rear part of the abdomen.
- They have 2 segments (nodes) at the waist.
- Antennae are 12-segmented ending in a 3-segment club.
- Queens are larger at around 5mm long and are a darker reddish-brown colour.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Pharaoh ants are social insects, living in colonies of up to 300,000 individuals. As with other ant species, colonies consist of sterile workers, males and queens. Workers forage outside the nest for food to bring back to the nest. The queen and the males are responsible for breeding. Queens can be replaced if they die so colonies will survive indefinitely.

WHY ARE THEY SUCH A PROBLEM?

Pharaoh ants become a nuisance when they forage for food in our homes. They are able to communicate food and water sources to other workers resulting in large numbers being found in kitchens and bathrooms. Pharaoh ants are capable of picking up and transferring germs when walking from dirty areas to foraging sites such as kitchen surfaces.

HOW DOES A PROBLEM OCCUR?

Pharaoh ants need warm humid conditions, which mean that in the UK they are confined to inside buildings. Infestation may be a result of the introduction of infested material, or people entering the premises after being in another infested area, or they may have travelled from neighbouring premises. The ants then spread through buildings through service ducts (e.g. hot water pipes), in search of food and water. As they are attracted to water, they can sometimes be found inside kettles and other water storage bodies, such as jugs and bottles.

CONTROL AND TREATMENT

To achieve successful control of an infestation, all the nests should be destroyed. Unless every last ant is removed, the colony may be able to return to its former size after treatment. Pharaoh ants are particularly difficult to treat as using an insecticide will only kill off worker ants and the colony can easily make more! The nests are hard to locate and remove, as they are usually deep within the fabric of the building. Furthermore, multiple colonies are often formed when queens leave a nest and relocate forming new nests.

A good solution is to use granular insect growth regulators which are collected by worker ants and taken back to the nest where the growth regulator renders the queens infertile. This prevents the colony from growing and causing the ants to die of old age. This treatment may seem like a long way round but it's the most long-term effective solution. Treatments of this nature are very lengthy, and can involve several follow up visits.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

The treatment involves the use of insecticidal baits and relies on workers taking the bait back to the nest. The bait prevents the larvae from developing and affects egg production by the queen:

- DO NOT use any other insecticides during the period of treatment, as this will kill the workers, which are required to take the bait back to the nest.
- DO NOT leave any food out, this could attract more ants. It also reduces the chances that the worker ants will take the poisoned bait back to the nest, since they will prefer to take the real food.
- DO clean food preparation surfaces regularly since these ants can carry a number of pathogenic bacteria. Dispose of waste promptly and carefully.