



April Showers Bring May ... Pests?

Weather can have a dramatic influence on the number and kinds of pests that enter a structure. Extreme heat and dry weather in the summer can result in ants seeking sources of water and cooler environments indoors. In the winter, pests like box elder bugs and cluster flies seek warm structures to overwinter. Rainy springtime weather is no different. Warmer temperatures and wet weather can cause pests to move from their outdoor overwintering locations into structures.

During the winter months many outdoor insect invaders, including ants, spend much of the winter in sheltered locations under rocks, logs, under mulch and in soil. Spending the winter underneath

insulated items or below the frost line in soil allows individuals as well as entire colonies to survive cold temperatures. When the weather warms and spring showers begin, resulting in saturated soil, many of these pests are forced out of their hiding places in search of drier places to nest. Ants are especially likely to enter homes following a heavy rain event.

In addition to seeking higher ground, ants may be forced indoors to forage for food when the sweet secretions of honeydew producing insects like aphids and scale insects is washed away during heavy rain. Honey dew is an important food for many ant species. Without their primary food source present outdoors, ants may come indoors in search of food. ■

Tackling Termites

Few insects strike more fear into the hearts of homeowners than subterranean termites, and for good reason. Over one billion U.S. dollars are spent every year on controlling termites or repairing the damage they caused. To make matters worse, most damage caused by termites is not covered by traditional homeowners insurance, leaving you to pay out of pocket for repairs. One reason why termites are so effective at inflicting such carnage is because they can feed on wood around the clock, all while remaining well hidden behind your walls. Despite their best efforts to go unseen, termites do leave behind clues that they are in the area. Here is some useful information

and tips to spotting hungry termites that every homeowner should know.

Subterranean termites are eusocial insects that live mostly underground in groups known as colonies. They are considered eusocial insects because more than one generation lives together, they cooperate with each other to raise their young, and they have specialized castes, or roles, that perform specific functions for the colony. Each termite colony has three primary castes: worker, soldier and reproductive. Workers are small, creamy white termites that measure about 1/4 inch long, and are responsible for the feeding damage to your *continued on page 2*



Winged reproductive termite

Termites continued from page 1



Worker termite



Winged reproductive termites



Soldier termite



Termite damage in a home

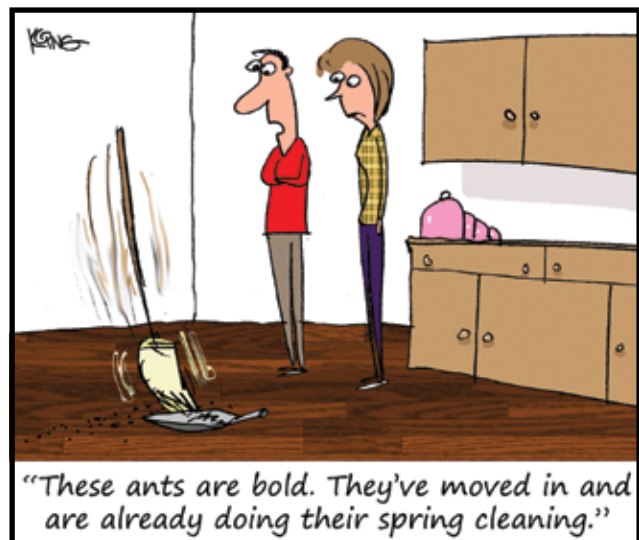
home. Soldiers are tasked with protecting the colony, and often have a larger head and mandibles used for defense. Reproductives are for, you guessed it, reproduction. In the spring as temperatures rise to the low to mid-70's, swarms of winged reproductive termites emerge from their colonies by the thousands in search of a mate to start a new colony. This mating period is known as swarm season.

Swarming termites offer a few valuable clues that can be used to determine their presence. The first and most obvious sign is to actually witness swarming termites. The farther away from the colony you are, however, the more difficult it becomes to spot termites in flight. But, even lone mating pairs of termites can leave behind evidence. After winged reproductives have found a mate, they drop to the ground to find a cozy underground honeymoon spot to start their new colony. Before disappearing, the termites break off their wings since they will no longer need them for flight.

Finding these small, translucent wings in spider webs, window sills or anywhere else around your home is a sure sign that termites are in the area.

Time is always of the essence with pests, especially when it comes to subterranean termites. The sooner that termite activity is detected, the greater the chances are of minimizing costly damage to your home. However, just because you find small insect wings doesn't guarantee that your home is infested with subterranean termites. Other damaging pests such as ants or beetles may also have wings that may look similar to the wings of termites. And, each of these invaders requires a very different management strategy to eliminate. Therefore, positively identifying pests is important to protecting your home as well as the health of your family. Be sure to call us at the first signs of any evidence so that we can identify the invader and keep your home pest free this spring. ■

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ANTS! EVERYWHERE ●

Birds are singing, flowers are blooming, and ants are everywhere. It must be spring time! There are a lot of things to enjoy about spring, but an overabundance of ants around your home is definitely not one of them. There are more than 50 different species of ants that regularly infest our homes, and they can be more than just a nuisance in our daily lives. Ants can destroy goods and property, and they can even pose a health risk by contaminating foods. Although it may not be possible to prevent ants from entering your home without professional help, you can reduce your chances of an infestation by following a few useful steps.

Ants invade your home in search of three things: food, water and harborage. Indoors, you can eliminate attractive food sources by immediately cleaning up food spills, not leaving dirty dishes in the sink and storing food items in the refrigerator or in sealed containers. However, foraging ants often attack homes from colonies nesting outside. Therefore, minimizing resources around your yard is equally as important. You can start by removing overgrown foliage, brush piles and excess fallen leaves to eliminate harborage or nesting sites on your property. In addition, keep trees, shrubs and bushes trimmed back away from any structure to prevent ants from using branches as a sky bridge into your home. Also, schedule regular trash pick-up, and keep waste containers clean and stored away from the home. This eliminates food sources that may attract hungry ants. Lastly, address any leaky pipes, AC drip lines or over-irrigated areas of the yard that could serve as moisture sources.

Excluding ants from entering your home is another important step in stopping these unwanted invaders. Common pest entry points include poorly sealed doors, windows, and plumbing and utility penetrations. A good rule of thumb is, if you can see light from the outside while you are standing inside, there is enough of a gap for ants to enter. Many of these access points can be corrected by replacing worn out weather stripping on doors and windows, or by using an appropriate sealant to fill other gaps. However, failing to identify or correctly seal all access points may still give ant's free access to forage and nest inside your home. Call us today to inspect your home, and to provide a detailed assessment of how we can protect your family from ants. ■



Spring into Action Against Springtails

Your flower beds are not the only things to enjoy the higher temperatures and increased rainfall this time of year. Springtails also thrive in these warm, wet conditions. Springtails, fittingly named for their jumping behavior, are tiny insects that typically live in moist soil. They are present year round, but populations typically spike in early spring where they can overflow into your pool, patio or even into your home. Springtails do not bite or sting, and are therefore harmless to people. However, because springtails jump when disturbed, they can easily be confused with fleas and can become a major nuisance pest indoors.

Springtails are very small, wingless insects about 1/16 of an inch long. They can vary in color from white to blue, grey or black depending on the species. Spring tails prefer to live and breed in moist soil and leaf litter where they feed on decaying organic material, fungi, molds and algae. Their natural feeding behavior serves an important role in our ecosystem because springtails break down old plant material, helping in decomposition and returning important nutrients to the soil.

Weather conditions play an important role in why springtails may move out of their typical soil environment. Springtails need just the right amount of moisture to survive. If their habitat becomes too dry or too wet, springtails will seek out more favorable conditions. This can lead to tremendous numbers of springtails moving onto higher ground, which can often include your home. Once inside,

springtails continue their search for moisture where they commonly end up in rooms with high humidity such as bathrooms or damp basements. Although these areas may be humid, springtails often die once inside the home unless a leaky pipe or similar moisture source is found.

The key to avoiding an indoor invasion of springtails is to focus on sealing the home and reducing moisture conditions. Outside, check for windows and doors that may not close completely, or plumbing and utility penetrations that may need to be sealed. Also, eliminate breeding sites such as areas with excessive mulch or leaf litter. Pay special attention to low spots around your yard that may collect water, and avoid overwatering shaded areas that may not dry as quickly. If a crawl space is present, ensure that the space has adequate ventilation. Inside the home, be sure that door sweeps provide a tight seal, and that leaky pipes or other sources of water leaks are corrected immediately. Potted plants can also serve as an indoor breeding site for springtails. Therefore, avoid overwatering plants to keep moisture levels low, and always inspect outdoor potted plants for signs of springtails before bringing the plants inside.

Remember, the presence of springtails can be an early warning sign of moisture issues that could attract pests and lead to costly water damage, so be sure to let us know if you have noticed springtails in or around your home. ■