Carpenter Ant Info

Biology and Habits

Carpenter ants are the largest of the pest ants found in Connecticut the black carpenter ant. Black carpenter ants are dull black and their abdomens are covered by yellowish hairs, while the Florida carpenter ant has a deep reddish-colored head and thorax and a shiny, black abdomen. Since ants from a single carpenter ant nest vary greatly in size, ant size alone is usually not a good characteristic for identification. Carpenter ants vary in size. To confirm their identify, collect a few ants in a vial filled with a preservative such as rubbing alcohol, and send them to a Cooperative Extension Service county agent. Look in the white pages under county name for the phone number of the nearest county extension office.

Carpenter ants, vary in size and color but are usually large (1/4 to 1 inch) and blackish. Occasionally, swarms of winged carpenter ant reproductive will emerge inside a home. Carpenter ant swarms usually occur in the spring and are a sure sign that a colony is nesting somewhere inside the structure.

Damage to wood caused by carpenter ants is different than the damage to wood caused by subterranean termites. Carpenter ants chew wood with and across the grain, while termites only damage wood with the grain. Furthermore, termites often line their galleries with mud, while carpenter ant galleries are smooth, clean, and devoid of mud and other debris.

Carpenter ants are most active at night, when it is not uncommon to see 10 to 20 fold or more ants than would be seen during daylight hours. Ants emerge about 15 minutes after sundown and leave the nest in large numbers in search of food, traveling up to hundreds of feet from the nest on semi-permanent trails. Unlike other pest ant species, carpenter ants create semi-permanent trails through the grass from their nest to areas where they collect food. Movement between nest sites and between nest sites and feeding sites is often facilitated by the use of these well-maintained, semi-permanent trails. In the evening, ants can be seen using these trails as they emerge from and return to their nest. Colonies may even use the same trail in different years. Carpenter ants also follow man-made guides such as wall edges when foraging.