

Question: My house is being invaded by ants. We do not leave food stuff or dirty dishes out so what is causing this ant explosion?

Answer: When outdoor temperatures get hotter and conditions get drier ant problems get markedly worse. The ants are most likely Argentine ants but during the extreme droughts such as we have had this year fire ants may also come indoors. Both travel in trails into kitchens, offices and bathrooms searching for food and/or water. Even if you are super clean they may come indoors in search of water.

Argentine ants which are small, just 1/8 inch long are very consistent in size. They are native to South America. They were accidentally introduced into the United States more than 100 years ago in New Orleans coffee shipments. Fire ants are likewise South American natives and came in sometime later through Mobile. Fire ants will often be quite variable in size from 1/16 inch to 1/4 inch long, they have reddish brown bodies and black abdomens and they also bite!

Entomologists say you can reduce your chances of having ants in your home but even the cleanest homes may become infested. To discourage them, rinse all drink cans before placing them into the garbage or recycling bin and empty garbage containers often. And, don't leave any food or drinks out for any length of time. Argentine ants love sugar and will show up to dine on it, literally by the thousands, overnight.

For Argentine ants most experts don't recommend using contact insect killers. These products may make you feel better because you can watch the suckers die in real time but you'll never get rid of them all. For long term controls of both types of ants you have to kill the queen or queens. For Argentine ants the ant bait stations or gels work the best. They don't give you that immediate satisfaction of a contact killer but the results are much longer lasting.

If you have fire ants the control should involve a little more effort in finding the source. Treating outside will help control ants foraging inside from outdoor colonies. Although unlikely it is possible the ants are nesting in a wall. In this case, a contact insecticide should be used at the nest source and it may require assistance from a professional pest control operator to locate the nest. More likely, the fire ants are in an outdoor mound and foraging for food or water indoors. You might say they live in the suburbs and commute in to work. If you decide to treat indoors make sure the product you select is labeled for use indoors. Read and follow the directions on the product label for best results. Be sure to keep products away from children and pets. Again, eliminating the outdoor colonies will be critical to ridding your home of this menacing pest.

For more information visit the newest nationwide Extension website: www.extension.org and check out the fire ant portion of the site. This site has a wealth of information that you can trust has been well researched and is very up to date.