IDENTIFICATION
AND
CONTROL
OF
HOUSEHOLD ANTS
IN
NEW MEXICO

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INTRODUCTION

This booklet is designed to help homeowners and the pest management professionals in New Mexico identify and control ants in and around a home or commercial business. The control methods are non-toxic and for homeowner use. The pest control professionals can use products labeled for the control of ants. Many of the ants covered are common in homes, while others are rarely encountered but should be recognized so they can be treated if necessary. The ants belong to the insect family FORMICIDAE. The family is divided into 7 distinct subfamilies, but only 4 of them have species that may interact with people. There are approximately 240 species of ants belonging to 43 genera (groups) found in New Mexico. This booklet will cover 20 genera. In some cases, several distinct species in a genus will become pests, in other cases where there are many species in a genus, only a few will interact with people. The number of species we deal with is flexible, depending on habitat and what part of the state you are in. Also, most of the ants mentioned in this booklet are common in all western and central states, so this booklet may be of help in much of the country.

All the illustrations came from www.antweb.org, which is the best website on the internet when it comes to information about ants. I also occasionally recommend a good cedar product to use in your home to control ants and other pests. It is Greenbug for Indoors and is available online from www.greenbugallnatural.com.

I have a book on my website that covers all household pests in the U. S. and includes a section on pest-proofing your home. This book is available as an e-book and can be obtained on my website at www.askthebugman.com. We also have a monthly publication called Bugman's Insider Newsletter, that talks about natural pest control methods and other healthy, natural living suggestions. You can subscribe to it on my website. You can also find a lot of good information on healthy, natural living at www.urbandewberry.com. It is a great website and very informative. You are also invited to follow me on Twitter @askthebugman and visit my profile on Linkedin and my Facebook page at Ask the Bugman.

ANT INFORMATION

Ants are the most common household pests in the country. They create more calls to pest control companies than most other pests combined. For being so noticeable and so persistent in your homes, they are not readily recognized beyond five generic group names: sugar ants, grease ants, piss ants, red ants and black ants. One supervisor with a very large pest control company narrowed it down to two groups; inside ants and outside ants. This is a little bit simplistic.

Ants are very successful social insects. They have small to large colonies which contain workers (sterile females), queens (one or many, secondary reproductives that take the place of queens when she passes on and winged reproductives (known as alates) whose sole responsibility is to start new colonies. When I say an ant species is monomorphic, it means all the workers are the same size. When they are dimorphic, they are two sizes, minor and major workers and when they are polymorphic, it means they come in several sizes. Carpenter ants are an example of ants that are polymorphic.

There are several things you can do to prevent ants from entering your home. The first step is exclusion. Go around the outside of your home and inspect it very carefully from an ant's point of view. Ants can sense cool air and aromatic odors emanating from your home and will try to gain access.
Check around the house at ground level and look for cracks in the foundation, voids around pipes, areas under stucco, weep-holes in bricks and similar areas that ants can use to gain entrance. All these areas need to be sealed, caulked, screened or otherwise altered to prevent ants from using them to get into your home. Check around your windows and doors to make sure they close tightly. If the doors aren't tight, you may have to install doorsweeps on them. Check your bushes, shrubs and trees to make sure you don't have any branches touching the roof. Don't stack firewood, bricks or anything else next to your house or ants and other insects may find a good place to nest. If you have bushes or shrubs next to your house, periodically inspect them for aphids, scales and similar bugs as ants are attracted to the honeydew they produce. The ants will get on the plants and eventually find their way into your home. Don't put flagstone or flat boards on the ground too close to your home or some species of ants will nest under them. On the other hand, mound-making ants will generally stay outside. They rarely leave their complicated and efficient home life in the mound to enter homes. If you don't want the ants making mounds in your yard, you can flood the nests with club soda or with white vinegar or food-grade DE. If you use the DE, mix 4 tablespoons per gallon of water. You can also use 1 gallon of orange juice diluted with 2 gallons of water and a dash of soap. If you prefer, you can also spread dry instant grits on the mound. The ants will eat it and not be able to digest it and die.

You can repel ants with a wide variety of products, including cinnamon, baking soda, Comet Cleanser, cedar oil, medicated baby powder, Tide, talcum powder, chalk, coffee grounds, borax, garlic, broken egg shells, bone meal, black or red pepper, peppermint, paprika, chili powder and mint leaves. If you have ants going into your hummingbird feeder, you can put duct tape, sticky side out, on the wire holding the feeder, to deter them.

The best way to control them when they get in your home is with baits. Different species have different food preferences. Some species will take a wide variety of baits, while others are more fussy. You can use a bait containing half baking soda and half powdered sugar and place it where you see foraging ants. You can also use instant grits, which they can't digest or use 2 packets of Equal or Nutrasweet, which contains aspartame, wherever you see the ants.

If the ants have a preferred food in your home, such as apple sauce, peanut butter, canned cat food, Karo Syrup, jelly or similar products, you can mix in small amounts of boric acid or borax or aspartame. Mix about 2% of any of these products in the food. Make sure you keep these baits away from children and pets. If the ants are dying near the baits, you are making it too strong and need to make a fresh batch with less boric acid or borax.

Here is a recipe for effective, homemade ant baits/traps that use borax. It attracts ants looking for either moisture or food. You will need: 3 c. water, 1 c. sugar, 1 tsp. borax or 2 tsp. food-grade DE or aspartame, 6 small screw-top jars with lids, such as jelly jars covered with masking tape, which will enable the ants to climb up the side. Mix the sugar, water and borax (or food-grade DE or aspartame) in a bowl. Loosely half-fill the jars with cotton balls or pieces of sponge or wadded paper towels. Pour up to ½ cup of the sugary mixture over the cotton balls, saturating them. Make several small holes in the lid. Screw the lids on the jars tightly.

If you smoke, always wear plastic gloves when making ant baits or they will sense the tobacco smoke on the baits and not go to it. Ants do not like cigarette or cigar smoke.

If you are finding ants in a classroom or office building and baits aren't practical, then you can spray all of the foraging ants with Greenbug for Indoors, which is a cedar product and will kill the ants it hits and repel others.
IDENTIFICATION KEY TO THE GROUPS (SUBFAMILIES) OF HOUSEHOLD ANTS

A. Ants have two nodes on pedicel. The pedicel is the section between the thorax (where the legs are attached) and the abdomen; Stinger present but not always visible..................MYRMICINAE
   Ants have a single node on the pedicel; Stinger lacking.............................................................B

B. Eyes very small..................................................................................................................ECITONINAE
   Eyes not very small..........................................................................................................................C

C. Posterior tip of abdomen with a tuft of hairs...........................................................FORMICINAE
   Posterior tip of abdomen without tuft of hairs, orifice slit-shaped................DOLICHODERINAE

Subfamily ECITONINAE
This is a subfamily of legionary ants. There is only one genus in New Mexico and it is easily recognized by its very small eyes. Legionary ants are nomadic and are constantly moving. They are entirely carnivorous and they are capable of stinging.

*Neivamyrmex nigrescens* (Legionary ants, driver ants, army ants)

INFORMATION
There are 17 species of legionary ants in New Mexico. One species, the black legionary ant, *Neivamyrmex nigrescens*, is found statewide and is the only species likely to be encountered by the homeowner. It is usually dark brown or black in color and very hairy.

HABITS
Army ants are nomadic and are always moving around looking for insects, which is their primary food. They are occasionally found in yards foraging for food and will come in homes under doors, although this is rare. They will not nest in homes and will eventually leave by themselves.

CONTROL
Normally, no control is necessary. If you have to control them in your house, spray them with a natural product such as Greenbug for Indoors, which is made from cedar. It is absolutely safe to use.
Subfamily MYRMICINAE
This is the largest subfamily of ants. They are distinguished from other subfamilies in that they have two petiolar nodes on the pedicel (the segment that separates the thorax from the abdomen). Most species have functional stingers. There are eight genera of this subfamily that may be encountered in or near homes. They are *Aphaenogaster, Crematogaster, Monomorium, Myrmica, Pheidole, Pogonomyrmex, Solenopsis* and *Tetramorium*.

*Aphaenogaster cockerelli* (No common name)

INFORMATION
These slender ants are very fast when running outside. Their head is longer than broad and they have large eyes. The antennal club is poorly defined and has four segments and there are spines on the thorax. This species is widespread in New Mexico. There are 9 other species of this genus in the state and most of them have fairly restricted ranges.

HABITS
They make nests in the soil and the entrance to the nest is surrounded by pebbles. They feed on dead and dying insects, parts of plants and seeds. They rarely go into homes but they may be found near buildings and they are very aggressive when they are disturbed. They cannot sting, but they will bite in large numbers.

CONTROL
If you find them inside, you can mix a bait with 2 tablespoons of peanut butter mixed with a teaspoon of boric acid or borax. Outside, you can use Niban Bait to control them by placing the bait around the entrance hole to their nests.
Acrobat ants are found over most of the United States. There are 18 species of this interesting ant in New Mexico. If you look at the picture, you will see the abdomen (last segment) appears flat on top. It is spade-shaped when viewed from above. They have two little spines on the thorax. When they get excited they point their abdomen up in the air and run around on four legs, hence their name, “acrobat” ants. Acrobat ants are monomorphic. These ants will sting and bite when they are in large colonies. When they are in smaller colonies, they are not as inclined to sting or bite.

HABITS
Acrobat ants normally feed on the honeydew secretion of aphids and related insects that infest plants near your home. They may enter your home from the roof if there are any branches touching the house or from the ground. They will get between vigas and latillas in some homes and kick out a lot of loose sawdust. It looks like they are doing damage, but they aren't. They are simply making a mess.

CONTROL
They will readily take sweet baits. You can make a bait with two tablespoons of honey or Karo Syrup mixed with one teaspoon of boric acid or borax. Terro Ant Bait is also very good. You can deter acrobat ants by removing any firewood stacked near the house and by making sure none of the plants near the house are infested with aphids, scales or mealybugs. Also trim any branches that are touching the house, particularly on the roof.
Monomorium minimum (Little black ants)

INFORMATION
Little black ants (that is their name) are very small, shiny black ants that are monomorphic. They do not have spines on their thorax. These ants are found throughout the United States and southern Canada. Monomorium cyaneum is very similar in appearance. It has a series of small depressions on the side of the mid portion of the thorax. Monomorium minimum does not have these depressions. Monomorium cyaneum rarely enters homes. It is usually found nesting under rocks and other ground debris in arid areas.

HABITS
Usually they nest outdoors where they can feed on the honeydew secretion of some insects, but occasionally they infest homes. In a home they will eat whatever is available, including bread, meats, sweets, fruits and vegetables. They will bite to protect themselves.

CONTROL
They can be controlled using a bait made from two tablespoons each of peanut butter and jelly mixed with one tablespoon of boric acid or borax. They have large colonies and the baiting process may take awhile before it is effective.

Monomorium pharaonis (Pharaoh ants)

INFORMATION
Pharaoh ants are very small, yellowish ants that are monomorphic. They got their name because they were originally discovered and described in Egypt in 1758. They are found in many areas of the
United States. In New Mexico, they have been found in Farmington and Los Alamos. One pest control company said they found them in Albuquerque, but they couldn't find the samples for verification. They may be in Albuquerque, but I am hesitant to state as much until I can see specimens.

HABITS
They will nest in any small, dark voids such as old boxes, empty bags, stacked newspapers and even an unused salt shaker. Outdoors they will nest under objects on the ground, in potted plants, in stacked firewood or piles of bricks. They are primarily nocturnal and mainly come out to feed at night. They have very large colonies, often exceeding a quarter of a million ants and many queens. They do not swarm to reproduce as most ants do, but use a system called “budding.” This is where reproducitives just crawl off and mate nearby. Colonies of pharaoh ants usually contain many nests and it is essential to control all of them or you will never get rid of them. Pharaoh ants are a major pest in hospitals where they have been associated with over 20 disease causing pathogenic organisms and they often enter isolation wards, operating rooms and patient rooms where they feed on blood and blood products and then contaminate sterile areas.

CONTROL
Never use synthetic pesticides in trying to control these ants as all you will do is cause them to split up and you will make the problem worse. Place baits such as half and half fruit juice and aspartame in soda straws. Cut the straws into one inch segments and put the segments where you have seen the pharaoh ants foraging. You can even tape them to the underside of tables. You can change the baits periodically by mixing two tablespoons of peanut oil, sweet syrup, jelly or honey with one teaspoon of boric acid. Place the straw filled baits as close to the nests as possible. You can also put strained liver baby food, honey or peanut butter mixed with boric acid or borax in small cups. Treat any cracks and crevices around the outside of the home with Greenbug for Outdoors or diatomaceous earth.

Myrmica spp. (No common name)

INFORMATION
Ants in this group (genus) are small, dark-colored, have lots of groove-like indentations on the body and two well-defined spines on the thorax and the antennae has 12 segments. They differ from harvester ants (Pogonomymex) in that Myrmica lacks a psammophore (beard), which is present in pogos. These ants do have stingers but rarely if ever use them. There are 15 species of this genus in New Mexico, although only a couple of them are widespread in the state. The species in the photo is Myrmica latifrons.
HABITS
These ants rarely enter homes, but may be found in yards in mountainous areas, particularly in areas near pine forests. They will nest in soil, rotten wood or under debris on the ground. They feed on insects as well as the honeydew secretion of aphids and other Homopterans. The nests are very small.

CONTROL
Since the colonies are small and they won't invade a home, but may be found in a yard, no control is necessary, but you should be able to recognize them.

**Pheidole spp. (Big-headed ants)**

INFORMATION
Big-headed ants are very common. There are about 30 species found in New Mexico and many of them are found throughout the state and may enter homes. These include *Pheidole bicarinata*, *P. ceres*, *P. coloradensis*, *P. desertorum*, *P. hyatti*, *P. senex*, and *P. sorites*. They do not have large colonies and are not major pests. They have spines on the thorax.

HABITS
These ants are dimorphic. The smaller minor worker gathers seeds and the larger major worker with the enlarged head, breaks open the seeds. The majors also function as soldiers and help protect the colony. There are many more minor workers in a colony than major workers, so you probably need to get a large number of specimens to properly identify these ants. Big-headed ants usually live outside during the warm months and move indoors in the winter.

CONTROL
Niban bait is a good product to use to control these ants outside. You can put some diatomaceous earth behind baseboards in areas where you see them as they often come into homes through an expansion joint between the slab and foundation.
**Pogonomyrmex spp. (Harvester ants, pogos)**

**INFORMATION**

Harvester ants are comparatively large, 3/16” - 1/2” long, red to dark brown or black in color and, with one exception, they have a pair of spines on their thorax. They have a stinger and will use it if disturbed. Most harvester ants have a large psammophore, or beard, of coarse hairs under their head. This is used to carry fine sand during excavation of the nest. There are 11 species of harvester ants in New Mexico. Several are found throughout the state and may be encountered. They include:

*Pogonomyrmex barbatus* – This species is large, red and very prone to defend themselves. They are found statewide.

*Pogonomyrmex californicus* – This species is found throughout western New Mexico. This is the only species that doesn't have spines on the thorax. They make small mounds in sandy soil. This species has a barbed stinger which gets detached to remain in the flesh, as occurs when you get stung by a honeybee.

*Pogonomyrmex maricopa* – This species makes very large nests, sometimes up to 7 meters in diameter in sandy soils and the mounds may approach 2 meters in height. These ants will readily defend themselves and have a very painful sting.

*Pogonomyrmex occidentalis* – This species is very common in the mountains of New Mexico. They make large, cone-shaped gravel mounds. They are very defensive and can inflict numerous painful stings in a very short time.

*Pogonomyrmex rugosus* - This is a large, dark brown species that builds large crater-like mounds. Nests contain several thousand workers. Black widow spiders like to prey on this species of harvester ants.

**HABITS**

They make large mounds covered in gravel which retains heat and helps incubate the eggs in the nest below. These ants feed on seeds, which they gather and store for the winter. When they swarm in the summer, they fly high and will often land on a roof to rest. In some cases the swarmers will come
down chimneys and invade homes, or even elevator shafts on commercial buildings.

When making the nest, they clear large areas of vegetation. This allows the sun to warm the ground as their eggs are just below the surface during the summer. In the winter, they move the eggs deeper in the ground. Some species have colonies that may go 12 feet deep in the ground.

Harvester ants aren't aggressive, but they will sting intruders on their mounds and the stings can be painful.

**CONTROL**
The best product to use to control harvester ants is Niban Bait, a commercial grain-like bait that is made from boric acid. Place it around the entrance hole to their nest. Do not stick it in the hole or they will haul it off and not eat it.

*Solenopsis invicta* (Imported fire ants)

**INFORMATION**
This genus contains two distinct forms. One, the larger form is polymorphic, with very large colonies that are capable of being very aggressive and stinging when disturbed. These are known as fire ants. The other form is very small, has small colonies and do not sting. These are known as thief ants and they live in association with other species of ants where they steal the eggs and larvae of the other species for food.

In New Mexico, there are 11 species of the genus. One, the imported fire ant (*Solenopsis invicta*) has only been found in Las Cruces and Albuquerque. One colony was found in Hidalgo County but it was eradicated. They are a dark reddish-brown to black in color and are polymorphic. They have severe stings that can cause blisters and allergic responses to the venom as well as anaphylactic shock. Over 30,000 people a year in this country seek medical attention from the sting of these ants. Their mounds can be 2 feet in diameter and a foot and a half high. A single colony can contain close to a quarter million ants.
HABITS
Fire ants will eat both plant and animal products including rodents and some reptiles. They will feed on a wide variety of plants, including strawberries, potatoes and corn. Queens in the colony will need proteins, so when you mix baits for these ants you have to make sure they are protein-based. These ants are attracted to magnetic fields and will get in transformers, air conditioners and other electrical equipment. One good thing about fire ants is that they like to feed on ticks. If you have fire ants in your yard, you won’t have ticks. They will also feed on fleas, cockroaches and several species of flies.

CONTROL
When you control these ants, make sure you dust any electrical equipment outside with food-grade diatomaceous earth, Comet cleaner or talcum powder. This will keep the ants out of these areas. For a bait, you can mix boric acid or aspartame with sugar, jelly, honey or pet food. Mix two tablespoons of the food with one teaspoon of boric acid or two packets of Equal (aspartame). You can flood their nests with one gallon of orange juice mixed with two gallons of water and a cup of dish soap. You can also pour a couple of 2-liter bottles of Coca Cola down the mounds.

Solenopsis xyloni (Southern fire ants)

INFORMATION
Southern fire ants are usually dark colored, but sometimes they are bi-colored with a red head and thorax and black abdomen. These ants are polymorphic. They are found over much of New Mexico. In the Albuquerque area they are very common on the west mesa, particularly in Taylor Ranch.

HABITS
They are not as aggressive as the imported fire ant (Solenopsis invicta), but they will sting and it is painful. They cause considerable damage to seed banks, kill newly hatched birds, girdle agricultural plants, and get into electrical equipment where it is known to have remove the rubber insulation from wires. They will infest homes where they will feed on meats, grease, butter, seeds, grains and similar products. When they enter homes, they are attracted to laundry that needs to be cleaned.

CONTROL
Niban Bait is effective when you have access to the colony. Diatomaceous earth behind baseboards will help keep them out if they are coming in from expansion joints. In some severe cases, you may have to hire a competent pest management company.
Solenopsis molesta (Thief ants)

INFORMATION
Thief ants are very small ants that are related to fire ants, but resemble pharaoh ants. They are less than 1/16\textsuperscript{th} of an inch long. The best way to tell them from pharaoh ants is to examine the antennae with a magnifying glass. The club on the end of the antennae has two segments in thief ants and three segments in pharaoh ants. Thief ants get their name from their habit of entering the colonies of other ant species and stealing their eggs and larvae for food. These ants are found throughout the United States but are more common in the east and south. They are monomorphic.

HABITS
Outside they nest under debris on the ground, or under rocks, boards or logs. In a home, they will nest in wall voids and behind baseboards. They will often make themselves known in a house when another species of ant is eradicated. The thief ants were probably feeding off the other ants and when they were controlled and they had to come out and look for food. They will also feed on dead rodents, so they may convey pathogens to human food.

CONTROL
Baits do not work well for these ants as they don't bring enough back to the colony for it to work. If you can find out where they are nesting, you can put some food-grade diatomaceous earth in the void. Cinnamon will repel them from areas you don't want them. You can also spray the ants with Greenbug for Indoors and use diatomaceous earth in all the cracks and crevices around the outside of your home.
**Tetramorium caespitum (Pavement ants)**

**INFORMATION**
Pavement ants are small, monomorphic, brown to black ants covered in small stiff hairs. The head and thorax are highly sculptured, with numerous parallel ridges running lengthwise. There are two small spines on the thorax and they are brown to black in color. In New Mexico, these ants are only found in Albuquerque. There is another species, *Tetramorium hispidum*, found in southwestern New Mexico. It does not infest homes. It can be separated from the pavement ant by the antennal segments. *Tetramorium caespitum* has 12 segments in the antennae and *T. hispidum* has 11 segments.

**HABITS**
These ants frequently nest under concrete slabs as their name implies. They will also nest under the slab in homes and then enter the home through the expansion joints or where plumbing penetrates the slab. Once inside, they will nest inside of walls or other voids, often close to a heating source for the warmth. They can sting and bite to protect themselves. Pavement ants feed on the honeydew secretion of aphids and other insects as well as on seeds. They have very large colonies.

**CONTROL**
Pavement ants readily take baits. Mix two tablespoons of peanut butter and jelly or honey with a teaspoon of boric acid or borax. If you can find their nest, you can dust it with food-grade diatomaceous earth.
Subfamily DOLICHODERINAE
These ants can be recognized by the slit-like terminal orifice at the tip of the abdomen. They also do not possess a stinger and the pedicel consists of a single segment (petiole). The antennae of all the species have 12 segments and no club at the end of it. The workers are all monomorphic and they all have a characteristic disagreeable smell, which you can detect when holding an individual between the thumb and forefinger. Most species have small nests consisting of a few hundred workers. The Argentine ants and velvety tree ants are an exception as it as they have very large colonies. There are four species that can be household pests and one that will decorate your yard with its little mounds.

*Dorymyrmex insanus* (Pyramid ants)

INFORMATION
Pyramid ants are reddish-brown or black in color. They have a distinct pyramid-shaped projection on the back of their thorax, hence their name. There is also a bi-colored pyramid ant (*Dorymyrmex bicolor*) found in much of New Mexico and a larger species that is over 3 mm (*Dorymyrmex smithi*) that is found in the western portion of the state, with a couple of records from the Albuquerque area.

HABITS
These small ants rarely come into homes. They usually make many small mound around the yard and in cracks in sidewalks and on patios. They are often found in close association with harvester ants (*Pogonomyrmex* spp.)

CONTROL
They will readily take a sweet bait such as jelly or honey mixed with aspartame if they do come indoors. Terro bait is a good commercial bait. Outside pour a cup of baking soda on the mounds, wait about a half an hour and pour a cup of vinegar on the mounds. You can also pour a 2-liter bottle of Coca Cola or Club Soda down the mound. Push a stick into the mound entrance and move it around to make the hole larger before pouring the Coca Cola or Club Soda in.
**Forelius pruinosus** (No common name)

**INFORMATION**
Ants in this group don't have a common name. It is very similar to the Argentine ants, but have a pair of long hairs on the top of the thorax and four tooth-like projections on the mandibles. They have multiple queens. They are found throughout North America and south to Colombia.

**HABITS**
They feed on nectar from flowers and are very common in arid areas such as desert scrub, weedy areas, grama grasslands, creosote, mesquite, cholla, juniper, sagebrush and even in pine forests. They also feed on dead insects. They nest in soil, usually in open areas but may be found nesting under stones. The nest is usually a small mound with a small entrance hole in the center, similar to pyramid ant mounds. The workers forage in groups and will frequently forage for food in the hot afternoon when no other ants are active. They occasionally find their way into homes or commercial buildings where they can become serious pests.

**CONTROL**
Sweet baits are the best method of controlling them, but it may take time as they have multiple queens and can be quite difficult to eradicate. Many pest control people confuse these ants with Argentine ants. You can treat the mounds the same way as described in treating pyramid ant mounds.
INFORMATION
Argentine ants have enormous colonies that often merge with other colonies. They originally came from Brazil, moved to Argentina and now they are all over most of California and some other parts of the country as well. In New Mexico they have been documented from Albuquerque only. They have many queens in a colony and each one is capable of producing 60 eggs per day. Argentine ants are capable of transporting the causative organisms of dysentery, typhoid fever and tuberculosis because of the filthy places they may crawl through.

HABITS
Nests are often found in urban habitats and it does not live in arid areas. They are very persistent house pests. When two colonies of this ant meet, they form mega-colonies and can control very large areas. Outside it will nest in exposed soil and under stones as well as in rotten wood, refuse piles, bird nests, bee hives and in dead trees. They do not swarm as many other ants do, but the winged reproductives mate in the nest. Outside they will feed on a variety of foods, including certain plants, buds of fruit trees and even ripened fruit such as figs. They also feed on the honeydew secretions of aphids, scales and mealybugs. In a home they will eat almost anything edible, including sweets, meats, pastries, fruit, dairy products, eggs, animal fats and vegetable oils. They are particularly fond of sweets. They will crawl over everything in a house, including appliances, furniture, shelves and clothing. The good news is that they do not sting. However they can bite.

CONTROL
Outdoors I recommend using a very good cedar product called Greenbug for Outdoors. Cedar will repel most ants including Argentine ants. Spray this around your foundation every couple of days for awhile. After a couple of weeks, spray it once a week. Soon you can do it every two or three weeks. It doesn't have the residual power of a pesticide, but it isn't dangerous either. You can also use aromatic cedar mulch which will control them for several months. Also; Remove all mulch (other than aromatic cedar mulch) from around the foundation of the building. Seal all cracks and crevices. Do not let any branches touch the building. If you find the nests outdoors, flood them with orange juice in soapy water Argentine ant workers have a sweet tooth, so indoors you can use sweet baits. Mix two tablespoons of honey or light Karo Syrup with a packet of Equal (aspartame) or a teaspoon of boric acid or borax. However, queens also have high protein requirements so you may want to make some peanut butter or fish meal baits with boric acid or borax at the same ratio. Keep all of these baits away from children and pets.
Populations indoors are usually smaller and less active. Find the most active areas and sprinkle the areas with baking soda, Comet, Tide laundry soap, talcum powder or food grade diatomaceous earth. You should also place any of these materials in any cracks and crevices, wall voids and electrical outlets. If you see trails of ants, you can spray them with bleach or vinegar. Never spray pesticides on the ants as all you will do is kill a few and the rest will go to other areas of the house.

If the infestation is severe, you may want to treat the perimeter of your house with Termidor, which is labeled for Argentine ants. Termidor is a General Use pesticide that is available to the public. You can get it online. One good supplier is [www.pestcontrolsupplies.com](http://www.pestcontrolsupplies.com). Mix the material as specified on the label, put it in a one-gallon sprayer and spray around the foundation of your house. Don't spray more than six inches from the foundation as you don't want to kill beneficial insects in your yard.

**Liometopum apiculatum (Velvety tree ants)**

![Liometopum apiculatum image](image)

**INFORMATION**
These ants have large heads and a very pubescent abdomen, which gives them their name of velvety tree ants. They have enormous colonies, consisting of tens of thousands of individuals and they can be very aggressive. They can't sting, but they will bite. This ant is the dominant ants species in oak forests in New Mexico and if a home is in this area, it may get infested. There is one other species in this genus in NM. It is *Liometopum luctuosum* and it is found in western New Mexico. It is also very aggressive.

**HABITS**
They feed on dead insects and the honeydew secretion of aphids, scales and mealybugs. They will share their nests with other species of ants. When they are found in homes, their nests may be a couple of hundred feet away from the building, which makes control difficult. The nests can be under stones or in dead trees, particularly oaks, if they are available. They usually enter homes by climbing trees and gaining access to the roof from branches touching the house.
CONTROL
Controlling these ants is best accomplished by finding the nest. However, that is often not possible, so the next best thing to do is to pest proof your home so they can't find their way in. Seal or screen any openings, cracks, crevices, etc. and make sure there are no tree or shrub branches touching the house.

*Tapinoma sessile* (Odorous house ants)

INFORMATION
Odorous house ants are small dark reddish-brown to black ants. When crushed they give off a pungent odor similar to a rotten coconut or rancid butter, hence their names. While other species in the subfamily Dolichoderinae give off an odor, this species is much stronger. These ants are found in all of the continental United States and adjoining parts of Canada and Mexico. They are probably the most common ant found in homes, except in areas where Argentine ants live.

HABITS
They are found in a wide variety of habitats from grasslands to oak forests and into high elevation forests consisting of pines, pinyons, juniper and aspen. They do avoid very arid areas such as open desert. They have large colonies consisting of up to 5000 workers and the nests contain multiple queens. They feed on dead insects, juices of decaying fruits and vegetables and the honeydew secretion of aphids and related insects. They nest under objects such as rocks, boards, or any kind of debris. When they come into a home, they can nest in wall voids. If the house has a crawl space, they will nest in that area and come into the house to forage for food and water. They have been known to nest in wood damaged by termites.

CONTROL
A good bait for controlling these ants indoors is two tablespoons each of peanut butter and jelly mixed with a teaspoon of boric acid or borax. A good commercial bait is Terro Ant Bait which is made from boric acid. Treat areas where they are entering your home around the outside with Greenbug for Outdoors, which is a cedar product.
Subfamily FORMICINAЕ

Ants in this subfamily have a circular orifice, surrounded by hairs, at the end of their abdomen. Some species will spray a formic acid mixture at their enemies from this orifice. The antennae have 12 segments and there is no antennal club. Some species are dimorphic or polymorphic. They prefer cooler, moister areas of the state. Workers of most species tend Homopteran insects such as aphids, for the honeydew secretion. These ants cannot sting although many of them will bite.

*Acanthomyops* spp. (Yellow ants, citronella ants)

INFORMATION

Yellow ants are medium size ants yellow in color. The eyes are fairly small. If you look at the antennae, you will see the first long segment (the scape) is shorter than the head. In other ants, the scape extends beyond the top of the head. They are monomorphic. When they are crushed, they give off a distinct lemon or citronella odor, hence one of their common names. These ants are found throughout the Midwest and New England and more commonly, in the southern states including Texas and New Mexico. There are 8 species in New Mexico. Four species, *Acanthomyops coloradensis, A. interjectus, A. latipes* and *A. occidentalis*, are found in many areas of the state and may be encountered by the homeowner.

HABITS

They feed on the honeydew secretion of aphids and similar insects. They will nest under debris on the ground around a house and in foundation walls but rarely forage in a home. They will nest under a slab in the home and push dirt up from cracks or expansion joints. Usually it is the swarmers that are found in homes and they are often mistaken for termite swarmers.

CONTROL

If they come in the house, use a sweet bait mixed with aspartame to control them. If you can find their nest and reach it, you can dust the area with diatomaceous earth.
**Camponotus spp. (Carpenter ants)**

**INFORMATION**
Carpenter ants are found throughout the United States. There are 21 species in New Mexico. Most of them are large, but there are several smaller species. They have a convex thorax which makes it easy to tell them apart from field ants, which have an indented thorax. Otherwise the two ants are very similar in appearance. Carpenter ants are polymorphic. Common species found in homes in New Mexico are *Camponotus herculeanus*, *Camponotus laevigatus*, *Camponotus modoc* and *Camponotus vicinus*. The last species is illustrated and the most common one found in the Albuquerque area.

**HABITS**
Most species are active in the late afternoons and at night. They will nest under the slabs of homes and enter through expansion joints or around plumbing. They are also found in crawl spaces under homes that have them. They will be most common in areas where there is moisture. If there is damp wood available, they will make galleries to make their nests. The galleries will follow the grain of the wood. If left alone, they can hollow out and destroy structural wood. They don't eat the wood, they just carve out areas and create wood segments (frass). If they are in the house, they will forage for any foods available, including pet foods, candies, syrups, sugar and other sweet products. They will also feed on any fruits they encounter and will root through the garbage looking for grease, fat or meat scraps.

**CONTROL**
You can use a bait made from two tablespoons of honey or jelly mixed with a teaspoon of boric acid and place it where the ants are foraging (keep out of the reach of children and pets). You can also put out open packets of Equal (aspartame), which they will take. You can use a commercial bait like Niban also. It is available online from www.pestcontrolsupplies.com.

To prevent carpenter ants from entering your home, you should remove or repair all damaged wood that has a moisture problem. Make sure your gutters are clean so water doesn't back up and damage the siding or the roof and that no branches are touching the house. Store all firewood off the ground and away from the house. Remove all dead stumps and logs. I also recommend dusting your crawl space, if you have one, with food-grade diatomaceous earth. This can be done with a power duster.
**Formica spp. (Field ants)**

**INFORMATION**
This is the largest group of ants in North America when counting species. They are common in mountainous areas of New Mexico and also occur at lower elevations. They come in a variety of colors, including red and black, all brown, all black or all yellowish. There are approximately 50 species of the genus *Formica* in New Mexico. You have to be an expert in the study of myrmecology (ant entomology) to properly identify many of them.

**HABITS**
Field ants are more common in the northern part of the state. They will nest in soil, thatched mounds or in logs and stumps. They feed on other insects as well as the honeydew secretion of aphids and scales. Many species are very aggressive. Although they can't sting, they will bite and then spray formic acid in the wound made by their mandibles. Repeated exposure to formic acid can cause the skin to peel. They are common pests at picnics in the mountains. Some species will enslave other species of ants. These ants rarely enter homes and are not normally a pest indoors.

**CONTROL**
The best method of controlling these ants if you live in an area where they are common, like Los Alamos or Santa Fe is to pest proof your home to keep them out. They won't take baits very well. If you have a crawl space, you may want to get it power dusted with diatomaceous earth.
Lasius spp. (Bosque ants, cornfield ants)

INFORMATION
These ants have a distinctive shaped thorax as it is flat and almost vertical on the posterior end, just before the node on the pedicel. They are normally light to dark brown. Most species are found in mountainous areas, but one species, *Lasius xerophilus*, prefers arid habitats. There are 13 species found in New Mexico.

HABITS
They feed on the honeydew secretion of aphids and other Homopterans and also on small insects. Some species feed tend plant lice on the roots of plants, including corn and are named cornfield ants. These ants will store and care for aphid eggs in their nest during the winter. In the spring, when the aphids have hatched from the eggs, the ants will carry them to the roots of certain grasses where the aphids will remain until the corn is grown and can support them. The ants then carry them to the corn roots. The ants actually protect, care for and transport the aphids as necessary. They do the same thing with aphids of cotton. They occasionally enter homes but are not major pests, although they will feed on any sweets and meats left out. When they do enter homes, it is usually through a brick floor that is sitting on sand. In Albuquerque, they are common along the river.

CONTROL
Mix a bait with two tablespoons each of peanut butter and jelly with a teaspoon of boric acid and place that where you see the ants. If you can find a nest, you can dust it with diatomaceous earth.
**Paratrechina vividula** (Crazy ants)

**INFORMATION**
Crazy ants are monomorphic, weakly bi-colored, shiny and have long legs. They are easily recognized by the presence of numerous thick, dark hairs on top of their thorax. There are five species found in New Mexico. The name crazy ants is not correct for the New Mexican species. It is usually applied to a species with very long legs found in the southeastern part of the country. This ant, *Paratrechina longicornis*, runs around in circles and randomly and acts “crazy”. Our species don't have this habit but they were given the common name because they belong to the same genus.

**HABITS**
They live in open, disturbed areas, urban habitats and greenhouses. They will swarm any warm day during the year when humidity is high. The constant drought will not enhance their ability to swarm. Most swarms occur from May to October and usually between six and ten o'clock at night. They feed on a variety of foods, including sweets and even other insects. They will also feed on the honeydew secretion from aphids and other Homopteran insects and they prefer arid and semiarid ecosystems. They have small colonies. Occasionally they enter homes or commercial buildings and become pests.

**CONTROL**
Baits should consist of sweets or proteins mixed at the ratio of two tablespoons of the bait mixed with one teaspoon of boric acid. They love garbage, so make sure garbage storage areas are as clean as possible. It will help to put food grade diatomaceous earth around the house under any bushes or shrubs.
**Prenolepis imparis** (Small honey ants)

**INFORMATION**
Small honey ants (also called false honey ants) are monomorphic. They are light brown or dark brown to black and the body is smooth and shiny. The thorax is very constricted in the center so it appears to be divided into two parts. This is best viewed from above. They have small colonies, consisting of a few thousand workers.

**HABITS**
These ants are more cold tolerant than other species and may be active all winter, even when the ground is frozen. They usually come in homes from outside, but occasionally will come up from under a slab through an expansion joint. Entire colonies of these ants have been found in potted plants. When they infest a home they will feed on sugar, syrup, honey, cakes, breads and fruits. They prefer sweet foods. They will even raid beehives to get the honey. They also feed on the honeydew secretion of aphids and other Homopterans.

**CONTROL**
If you can find their nests outdoors, you can treat it with diatomaceous earth, or a liquid substance such as Coca Cola or Club Soda. Poke a stick into the nest and pour in the soda. Inside, diatomaceous earth can be injected into cracks and crevices in uncarpeted areas where the ants hide. In carpeted areas, you may have to pull back the carpet to get the diatomaceous earth behind and under baseboards. Sweet baits such as two tablespoons of peanut butter and jelly mixed with a teaspoon of boric acid will work. You can also mix boric acid in with tuna fish or rotten liver. If you want to use a commercial bait, Terro Bait is a good product.