

Diggin' in The Dirt: Controlling Carpenter Ants

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Upcoming Programs

Food Preservation classes:

Jam and jelly season is officially here and gardens are starting to yield vegetables too! Get yourself ready to preserve your harvest by joining OSU Extension Educator Jenny Rudolph for a talk on safe home food preservation methods. Both of these events will also provide an opportunity for you to have your pressure canner gauges tested for free. Gauges should be tested for accuracy each year before using. So bring your canner with you!

Vernonia Public Library

Food Preservation Talk & Pressure Gauge Testing
July 9 at 6:30 pm

Fern Hill Grange

Food Preservation Talk & Pressure Gauge Testing
July 31 at 6:30 pm

Got food preservation questions?

Give us a call at (503) 397-3462. Food Preservation recipes and fact sheets can be accessed online at: <https://extension.oregonstate.edu/food/preservation>.

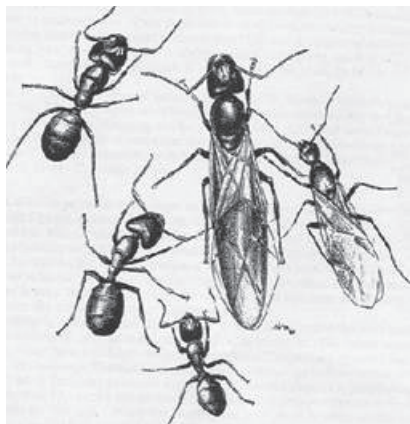
Josh Vlach presents, "Oregon Spider Facts!" June 27, 2019 - 6:30 pm at OSU Extension office in St. Helens

Come hear what entomologist Josh Vlach, of the Oregon Department of Agriculture (Insect Pest Prevention & Management Division) has to share about our Oregon spiders. Listen to cool facts about the species of spiders around the state and why they are far more beneficial than they are dangerous! Josh is extremely knowledgeable about Oregon insects in general. Free talk, open to the public.

Controlling Carpenter Ants

Carpenter ants are the scourge of homeowners in the Pacific Northwest. They do far more structural damage to homes and other buildings than all other insects combined. That said, they are part of our wood decay cycle and have been here far longer than humans have existed. This is the month when reproductive (winged) ants start emerging

from existing colonies. If you find them emerging from your house, you have a problem. If you just see random large queens that have shed wings, it probably isn't a problem since they wander far



and wide.

We have several carpenter ant species. Ants can be either all black (most common) or a designer combination of black and red. But don't confuse it with the mound-building and harmless thatching ant, which is also black and red. Carpenter ants have a smooth concave thorax (directly behind the head) with a single "spike" (called a petiole) between the thorax and abdomen. Carpenter ant size is variable. Ants grow with the food supply. If food was limited during their formative weeks, they may be quite small. If times were good, their size increases. It is not uncommon to have a range of different sized ants in the same colony. If you need them identified, bring them into the Extension office.

Colonies can be small with less than a thousand individuals up to colonies with over 50,000 ants. Main colonies are often located outside in stumps, rotten fence posts, or unused firewood piles. These often contain the queen. Treating these colonies is crucial for control success. Satellite colonies can form inside the house. These may not have a queen. If they don't, they gain new members from the main colony outdoors.

Carpenter ants don't consume wood for food. They use wood as a place to live. Their destructive work is a consequence of gallery building. They forage for food like any other self-respecting ant. Food can be protein sources, other insects, aphid honeydew (they protect

the aphids from predators), seeds and much more.

It takes some detective work to find inside or outside colonies. Late night observation on warm summer evenings can be helpful. Tell your neighbors what you are doing before you follow the ants with a flashlight. Finding lots of larger ants persistently in one area of your house is also an indication of a problem.

Here are some steps that a homeowner might take to reduce carpenter ant problems:

1. Treat wall voids with boric acid, Timbor, or desiccating dusts. This is especially useful during new construction.
2. Control moisture under the house and in the wall voids. While carpenter ants don't require moisture like dampwood termites do, they prefer to start in moisture-damaged wood.
3. Prune and maintain vegetation at least 18 inches away from the walls of the house. Ants can cross insecticide treatments on plant limbs and wires. You can also reduce nearby aphid populations.
4. Treat outside nests if you find them. Insecticide treatments are intended to interrupt their foraging paths. There are several compounds for ant treatment. Consider spraying a barrier 18 inches up the foundation and 12-18 inches out from the foundation in the spring and late summer.

There are also several insecticide bait products that are effective. Baits are designed to be carried back to the queen in sufficient quantities to kill her. That generally spells the end of that colony.

You may run into problems that resist exterior treatment. Often wall-void treatments are required. Wooden vaulted ceilings are also very difficult to treat and require expert help. It is best to call professional pest control operators to get these situations under control.

Thatching ant update

Last month I had an article on thatching ants. I said that they were beneficial and they are. But they do have an annoying habit of chewing up apple and pear blossoms for their sugary richness, it appears, sometimes stripping whole trees before they can be pollinated. One Vernonia reader brought this to my attention and it is, indeed, true. It can be prevented by attaching "tanglefoot tape" to the trunk of the tree before and during bloom. Ants aren't stupid and they move on to something else.

Coastal Sitka spruce turning brown

If you have been to the north coast recently, you probably have seen large numbers of browned spruce trees. If you look closely, you will notice that the new growth is normal but older needles look toasted.

This was not from excess heat. Rather, it was feeding by a periodic population explosion of the spruce aphid. This non-native aphid (it arrived in the early 1900s) sucks the sap from the needles in February through March or sometimes later. The damage doesn't really show until several months after they actually did the sucking. That is very frustrating for the homeowner. Outbreaks are favored by mild winters (that we had) and possibly increased if trees had been subjected to drought (which we have had, periodically for the last four years). Mild winters increase aphid numbers and drought-stressed trees can't marshal enough defensive compounds to stop their feeding. Lower parts of the trees are most affected. Rarely are trees killed but they can be weakened. Sitka spruce in fertilized lawns may be more susceptible because the aphids like a nitrogen-rich diet. For more information see: https://www.oregon.gov/ODF/Documents/ForestBenefits/Spruce_aphid_2017.pdf.

Free newsletter (what a deal!)

The Oregon State University Extension office in Columbia County publishes a monthly newsletter on gardening and farming topics (called *Country Living*) written/edited by yours truly. All you need to do is ask for it and it will be mailed or emailed to you. Call (503) 397-3462 to be put on the list. Alternatively, you can find it on the web at <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/columbia/> and click on newsletters.

Take excess produce to the food bank, senior centers, or community meals programs. Cash donations to buy food are also greatly appreciated.

The Extension Service offers its programs and materials equally to all people.

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Look for our next issue on July 4.



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