

BEWARE OF ARGENTINE ANTS!

Argentine ants were first detected as an established population in Auckland in 1990. They have since spread throughout the North Island and to a couple of South Island locations. They are often found in houses, gardens, plant nurseries and industrial areas. Infestations are usually not detected until they become a nuisance, which may take two years or more. By then they tend to be well established and may even have spread to other areas. Humans aid their spread, as they can hitch a ride on all kinds of materials and in vehicles and aircraft.

Nuisance Pests

The Argentine ant can become a severe pest in urban areas, persistently invading homes and commercial buildings in large numbers. They nest mainly in soil, retaining walls, and rock-gardens, under paths or cobblestones or at the base of plants in the warmer months. Wheelie bins and re-cycling containers, planter pots, cars and trucks also provide great nesting sites. They are most active in dry, warm weather, but the onset of wet weather and cooler temperatures drives them into buildings. Nests can contain hundreds of thousands of ants, and can usually be found inside the north or east facing warmer walls and in ceiling cavities.

Argentine ants are attracted to areas with people as these provide them with both food and moisture. They can travel quite long distances to food sources and will invade pantries and cupboards, getting in to what appear to be sealed containers. While they are attracted to sweet foods, they also feed on foods high in protein in the summer breeding season.

Residents in affected areas report a notable absence of many common garden insects following the establishment of the ants. On the other hand, Argentine ants actively protect and tend sap-sucking insects (e.g. aphids and scale) and affected residents find themselves fighting to control increased aphid and scale populations on citrus and ornamental shrubs, with some trees succumbing to the resulting stress and disease.



Photo courtesy of Anti-ants

Argentine Ants and Human Health

Argentine ants produce large numbers of aggressive and industrious workers, and when their nests are disturbed will run up legs and arms. They do bite, and some people may experience allergic reactions. As with any insect capable of biting humans there is a risk of foreign matter being introduced with the bite, leading to infection. Argentine ants have the potential to carry human pathogens around buildings, including health care facilities.

Ant Control

The control of Argentine ants can be difficult, and will require the assistance of recognised professional pest control technicians. Incorrect treatment will be largely ineffective and can exacerbate the problem. An effective bait (Xstinguish™) has only recently been developed. It is highly attractive to Argentine ants and has been used extensively to control them in New Zealand. Please note that the identification of Argentine ants by the non-expert can be very difficult. In case of a suspected infestation of Argentine ants it is advisable to contact a professional pest controller to identify and treat them.

THE THREAT

Argentine ants can displace indigenous ant species and other invertebrates through competition for food and/or predation. They could also threaten other indigenous species, such as the rare stitchbird and bellbird through competition for nectar, or animals that rely on invertebrates for food, such as geckos and skinks. They will eat virtually anything and they bite!



For further information visit:

www.biosecurity.govt.nz/pests-diseases/animals/invasive-ants/