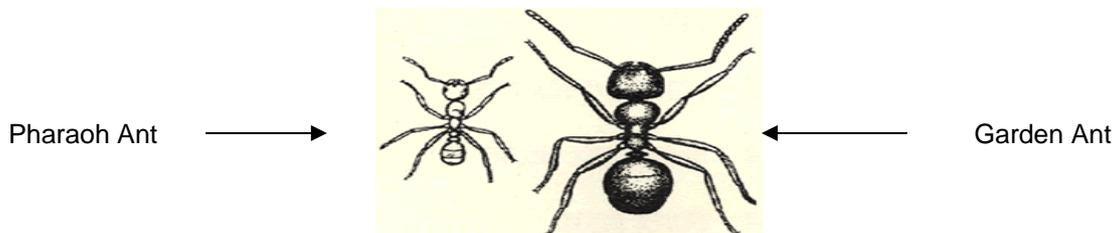


Ants



Description

The Garden Ant (*Lasius niger*) is by far the most commonly encountered species of ant in the UK. It has a black, dark brown/red segmented body of about 4mm length; the queen is brown and upward of 10mm length. The Pharaoh Ant (*Monomorium pharaonis*) is also occasionally found in the UK in hospitals, prisons and the like. It is yellow in colour and at 2mm in length is significantly smaller than the garden ant.

Biology and Habitat

Ants are socially complex insects living in colonies in large nests. One or more queens will lay eggs and feed the larvae, which develop into fertile males, sterile females (workers) and fertile females. The worker ants are responsible for building the nest usually outdoors in walls, under paving stones, in flowerbeds and under grass. Workers leave the nest on foraging expeditions to gather nectar from flowers and sugary solutions produced by aphids. Their attraction to sweet foods also causes them to invade houses and other premises through doorways, windows and gaps in brickwork and foundations.

Mating takes place in the summer when the winged males and females are seen in large swarms. When mating has taken place the males die and the females remove their wings and dig a cell in the ground where they spend the winter. A new nest is started the following spring. The eggs are laid in April and the larvae hatch in 3-4 weeks. The queen feeds them until they pupate. The first worker ants then emerge.

Importance

As a consequence of foraging activities garden ants often appear indoors in great numbers; this is unpleasant and unacceptable to most people. However, garden ants neither carry germs nor do they spread disease and hence their presence does not constitute a risk to health.

Control

In the garden, try to identify how the ants are gaining entry into the building and seal the point(s) with cement mortar or silicone sealant. Trace the ants back to the nest, which should be dug up, and large quantities of boiling water applied. When the area has dried, this should be followed by the application of an insecticide, preferably a powder, obtainable from garden centres etc.

Indoors, ensure that all sugary products are held in sealed containers. Line waste bins with plastic bags and empty them regularly.

Proprietary ant powder/liquid, or bait stations can be bought at many hardware stores, garden centres and supermarkets. The delayed action of insecticides often in gel form can be very effective in destroying ants' nests. The worker ants transport the poison back to the nest, where the colony is killed. If you are using this type of treatment, ants should be allowed to feed on it and take it back to the nests.

Safety

Not all insecticides are safe for use indoors, particularly where food is present. To protect yourself and others and to minimise damage to the environment **ALWAYS READ AND FOLLOW THE APPLICATION AND USE INSTRUCTIONS PRINTED ON THE CONTAINER.**

Free Internet access is available at all South Gloucestershire libraries

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