



by: Thamer Mahdi PhD., Entomologist/Technical Support Auditor, Quality Assurance



Carpenter Ant; the Unwelcome Spring Visitor

Among numerous pests we are going to encounter early this spring is the widely feared Carpenter ant. The presence of winged reproductive ants inside a structure in early spring or in the winter would mean an internal nest.

Carpenter Ant ID

Several carpenter ant species call Canada home, though the most common type is the Black Carpenter ant *Componotus pennsylvanicus*. Red Carpenter ant refers to few species of carpenter ant with lightly colored body parts ranging from reddish-orange to dark brown. Carpenter ant goes through Complete Metamorphosis (lifecycle includes egg – larva – pupa – adult). It takes 6-12 weeks from egg to adult. The worker is 6 to 12 mm long but the queen is 20-25 mm. The workers are polymorphic (different sizes); larger workers called "Majors" whereas the smaller ones called "Minors". The Minors are fully grown adults but have different tasks in the colony.



Ant Colony Development

Most carpenter ant species will have one fertilized queen in each colony.

One fertilized female fresh from her mating flight will make a small "Chamber" in a suitable location; seal herself inside it then starts her family by producing a small number of workers called "minims", from her initial batch of eggs feeding them from her body fat. This first batch of workers is responsible for nest excavation, foraging for food and caring for the next brood. The queen hides her nest for more than a year before allowing workers to forage outside the nest. The nest grows very slowly in the first and second year. This is why it is very difficult to detect the initial nest until it is well established. After few years (2000 – 3000 ants in the nest) the queen start producing Alates (winged adults in sexual mature stage) called "Swarms". They mate and start new nests.

Carpenter Ants Nests

Usually carpenter ant has one "Mother Colony" outside the structure in a tree trunk and up to 10 satellite colonies inside the structure. Mother and Satellite colonies could be established inside structures too in wall voids, window sills, attic, etc. in areas usually associated with moisture. All life stages are present in the mother colony whereas satellite colonies have only workers, larvae and pupae. Satellite colonies

communicate all the time with the mother colony and behave like army makeshifts within controlled territory. The queen prefers to initiate her new nest in damp moist wood or close to a moisture source. Carpenter ants construct their nests by burrowing into wood making tunnels. Unlike termites, carpenter ants do not feed on wood but only build their nest in it. Carpenter ants feed on sweets and protein in and around structures.



Signs of infestation

- The most prevalent sign of nest presence in a structure is sighting of alates.
- Piling of wood shavings or Frass beneath slit like openings in the wood.
- Numerous workers throughout the home.

Inspection and prevention techniques

- Trim tree branches touching the structure.
- Inspect parts of the structure that suffered from moisture damage recently or in the past few years.