

Extension Notes

carter.ca.uky.edu

AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES

Rebecca Konopka
Carter County Extension Office

Protect Your Home from Termites

Springtime brings warmer temperatures and more abundant rainfall, and it's typically when many winged termites emerge inside homes and other structures. Termites swarm from their colony to disperse, fall to the ground, find mates, and start new colonies in the soil.

Through May, you might see swarms of winged termites, called swarmers, inside your home, signaling an infestation that can cause extensive and costly damage. Since swarmers are attracted to light, you often see them or their shed wings around windows, doors, and light fixtures.

You may also see winged ants in the springtime. By examining the insect, you can determine whether it's a termite or an ant. Termites have straight antennae; ants have elbowed antennae. Also, termites have uniform waists; ants have constricted waists between body regions. Termites have two pairs of wings of equal size. Ants also have two pairs of wings, but the forewings are longer than the hindwings.

Other signs of a termite infestation are pencil-thin mud "tubes" on inside and outside surfaces such as foundation walls, piers, sills, and floor joists. Termites make these mud tunnels to travel between underground colonies and your home. Another sign of an infestation is damaged wood hollowed out along the grain with dried bits of mud or soil lining the feeding galleries.

Termite feeding, and resulting damage, can remain undetected in exposed wood because the outer surface usually is left intact.

Many infestations result from direct contact between structural wood and the soil, which gives termites access to food, moisture, shelter and provides a hidden entry into your home. Make sure to have at least six inches between the ground level and wood siding, porch steps, latticework, door or window frames, posts, and similar wooden elements. Contrary to popular belief, pressure-treated wood isn't immune to infestation, because termites will enter through cut ends or cracks and build tunnels over the surface to susceptible wood above.

Since termites are attracted to moisture, they are more likely to enter a structure when soil next to the foundation consistently is moist. So, divert water away from the foundation with properly functioning gutters, downspouts, and splash blocks. Repair leaking faucets, water pipes and air conditioning units. Adjust the soil grade next to the foundation so that surface water drains away from the building and adjust lawn sprinklers and irrigation systems to minimize water pooling near the foundation.

Reduce humidity in crawl spaces by providing adequate ventilation. Don't allow shrubbery and other vegetation to grow over vents; it will inhibit cross-ventilation. You can reduce crawl space moisture by installing four- to six-milliliter polyethylene sheeting over about 75 percent of the soil surface.

Firewood, lumber, and other wood debris stored against the foundation or in crawl spaces, attract termites and provide a food source. This practice also gives termites a hidden entry into the home and allows them to bypass any existing termiticide soil barrier.

Cellulose-containing materials including mulch and wood chips attract termites. Use these materials sparingly, especially when you have other conditions conducive to termite problems. Never allow mulch to touch wood siding, door frames or window frames. Consider using crushed stone or pea gravel instead. These materials are less attractive to termites and can reduce other pests such as millipedes, pillbugs, earwigs and crickets.

The best way to prevent termite infestations is to have your home treated by a professional pest control firm.

There are two general categories of termite treatment, liquids and baits. Liquid treatments are intended to provide an effective, long-lasting chemical barrier around and beneath your home that termites cannot breach. Termite baits are installed in plastic stations below the ground in the yard and occasionally indoors. Foraging termites consume the bait and share it with their nest-mates, resulting in a gradual decline in termite numbers.

What should you look for when choosing a pest control firm? The firm should be licensed by the Kentucky Department of Agriculture. Membership in the Kentucky Pest Control Association and/or National Pest Control Association suggests the company is an established firm with access to the training and technical information necessary to correctly do the job. Consider calling at least two to three companies and asking for references.

Avoid pest control firms that use “specials” or scare tactics to pressure you into immediately signing a contract.

Termiticides are extensively tested for adverse effects. Based on current research, registered termiticides present no significant hazard to humans, pets or the environment when applied according to label directions.

For more information on termites and other pests, contact the Carter County Cooperative Extension Service. Educational programs of the Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service serve all people regardless of economic or social status and will not discriminate on the basis of race, color, ethnic origin, national origin, creed, religion, political belief, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, pregnancy, marital status, genetic information, age, veteran status, or physical or mental disability.

Upcoming Events:

- **Hike & Learn** – May 4th @ 1:00 PM – Laurel Gorge Cultural Heritage Center
- **Extension District Board Meeting** – May 9th @ 10:00 AM
- **Floral Care & Arrangement Workshop** – May 11th @ 12:00 PM – Call 474-6686 to preregister.
- **Carter County Farmer’s Market Organizational & Business Meeting** – May 23rd @ 6:00 PM