

Pest Press

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INTEGRATED PEST MANAGEMENT

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Pavement ants (*Tetramorium caespitum*). Photo by Joseph Berger, www.insectimages.org.

IPM: Monitoring

Monitoring for pests is an essential part of an IPM program. Regular checks of pest-prone areas help you detect (and solve) minor problems before they become major ones. Look for damage, feces or other indicators that a pest is present. Common ant "hot spots" are anywhere food or food waste accumulates. Monitoring in the classroom is a simple process – learn where the problem areas are and check them regularly.

"SUGAR" ANTS

Outdoors, ants are important scavengers and predators, helping to keep our gardens and landscapes clean and tidy. Indoors, however, ants are no picnic. They can become a serious nuisance and may cause sanitation problems. They may bite or sting and have a nasty habit of walking all over your food without wiping their feet. In Washington, the most common invaders are pavement ants and odorous house ants. As a group, these small ants are sometimes called "sugar ants" due to their attraction to sweet foods. (Carpenter ants and moisture ants, which are considered structural pests, are not discussed in this newsletter.)

Ants are social insects that live in colonies made up of one or more queens (reproductive females) along with eggs, larvae, pupae, and worker ants. The ants you see are usually workers foraging for food. The pest species listed above typically have workers that are light brown to black in color and about 1/16" to 1/8" long (around 2-3 mm). You may see a single, wandering "scout" searching for food, or a trail of ants between the nest and a food source. Depending on season and species, the ants may be most attracted to sweet foods or beverages, protein sources (meats and dairy foods), or grease and oils. Sugar, honey, or spilled soft drinks are common attractants.

While single ant scouts are not much cause for alarm, they shouldn't be ignored as they will locate food sources and bring all their friends. Ant trails may involve hundreds or thousands of individuals moving back and forth and require attention immediately. Watch for ant trails along walls, under sinks and appliances, even under the edge of carpets. They may lead to spilled food or drinks, garbage cans, or stored food products.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

1. **Clean it up!** Ants are attracted to sweets, sugar, grease, protein, and even moisture. Wipe up spills promptly, vacuum or sweep after snack time and parties, and keep sinks and counters clean! Take the trash out daily, and keep the garbage cans clean, too.
2. **Store it right!** Do you keep food in the classroom or break room? Plastic, paper, and cardboard won't stop ants. Store food in clean, closed containers with tight-fitting lids (snap-top or screw-top lids with rubber seals).
3. **Rinse and recycle.** Ants are small – they don't need a lot of food, so a crumb or a drop is enough for a feast. Soft-drink cans and soiled food containers are very attractive to foraging ants, so wash with soapy water or rinse thoroughly before tossing them in the recycle bin.
4. **Plants and pets.** Pets or potted plants in the classroom? These can be attractive to ants, too. Plants can become infested with aphids or other honeydew-producing pests, and pet food debris can be an ant buffet. Monitor these attractive situations to prevent problems.
5. **Ants on the move.** If you see a few stragglers wandering through the classroom, you may be seeing the scouts for an ant invasion. Wipe them up with soapy water and a sponge and get rid of them before they report back to the nest. If you see trails of foraging ants, report them! Trails can be mopped up, vacuumed, or cleaned with soapy water and a sponge, but that alone may not solve the problem.

IPM FOR ANTS

Exclusion – Keep ants and other pests out by sealing cracks and crevices around windows, doors, wiring, plumbing and foundations. Seal gaps and cracks and maintain door sweeps in good condition. Since most ant pests nest outdoors, preventing access to the building is an important control measure.

Sanitation – Keep food preparation and eating areas clean. Rinse or wash recyclable food containers before storing. Empty trash cans daily and keep cans clean inside and out. At least once daily, wipe counters, sinks, and other surfaces that collect food debris. Store food in sealed containers with tight-fitting lids or inside refrigerators and freezers.

Monitoring – Regularly check pest-prone areas, such as kitchens and staff lounges, for indicators of ant problems. Moisture is also attractive to ants, so watch sinks and drains and report leaky plumbing immediately.

Physical controls – Wipe up individual ants with a sponge and soapy water and dispose of them. Ant trails may be wiped up, mopped with soapy water, or vacuumed.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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ON THE WEB:

UPEST (School IPM for Ants)
<http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/swfa/upest/schoolAnts.html>

IPM for Ants in Schools
<http://www.epa.gov/pesticides/ipm/schoolipm/chap-5.pdf>

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