



All About Termites

Subterranean Termites: These are the most common termites attacking buildings and are found throughout the United States. From nests in the ground they invade where wood contacts the soil or by building earthen tubes to provide protected access to wood above ground. Winged reproductives are about 1/2 inch long and workers and soldiers about 1/4 inch long.

Dampwood Termites: These are the largest American termites, with the winged forms over 1 inch long. Most species occur along the Pacific coast, with some in Florida and the Southwest, infesting wet wood, such as poles, posts and pilings. They do not build tubes to reach structures. Feces are characteristic oval-shaped pellets.

Drywood Termites: These are larger than subterranean termites but smaller than dampwood termites. They attack dry, sound wood which need not be in contact with the ground. They are the most common termite pest in the Southwest, infesting poles, lumber piles, buildings and trees. They spread by the flight of winged reproductives, which after mating enter through crevices in nearby wood, especially under the eaves. Unlike subterranean termites, they do not build earthen tubes and their tunnels in wood are smooth and clean-fecal material being dry pellets which are neatly stored or expelled in sawdust-like piles.

Powderpost or Furniture Termites: These termites infest dry woodwork, floors and furniture in the Gulf states. Their presence is usually indicated by the constant dropping of fine, powdery fecal pellets. Most unusual, all castes are small. Like drywood termites, there may be many small colonies in the same building.

What Can You Do Against Termites?

Termites avoid extremes of heat and cold as well as storms and predators by living what is known as a "cryptobiotic" or hidden way of life. This makes them extremely difficult for untrained personnel to detect until the damage they cause becomes obvious. Termites can attack all types of wood. Even termite-resistant woods, such as tidewater red cypress and western red cedar, can ultimately be attacked, because they lose their natural resistance with aging. Keeping termites out is extremely difficult, because in seeking wood to eat they have been known to penetrate ordinary brickwork, tar and asphalt, roofing felt and cracks in concrete. Professionally installed metal termite shields can be effective, but they may subsequently fail because of corrosion, accidental disturbance, or building settlement. Likewise, previously-applied chemical barriers may have been later disrupted during landscaping or construction of home extensions. Re-application of chemicals to the soil against termites is not a do-it-yourself option because these products are not available to homeowners and, in any case, all pesticide treatments against termites require special equipment and knowhow. However, here are 10 measures you can carry out that can help protect your property.

10 Things You Can Do

1. In new construction, specify the proper installation of termite shields on foundations, piers and other structural elements, and between wooden steps or porches and the main structure, to prevent termite access from the soil.
2. Eliminate wood contact with the ground (e.g. by replacing wooden posts and piers with concrete ones, and by supporting wooden steps on a concrete base at least 6 inches above the ground).
3. Regrade soil around the perimeter to ensure drainage away from the building and to maintain at least 6 inches clearance between wood siding or shingles and the ground.
4. Ensure there is at least 18 inches clearance in crawl spaces between all horizontal timbers and the ground.
5. Reduce humidity in crawl spaces by ensuring adequate cross-ventilation. Covering the ground with roofing paper will also reduce humidity under buildings by reducing evaporation from the soil.
6. Screen all vents, including vents in eaves, attics, walls and crawl spaces, with 20-mesh non-corroding metal screening to prevent termite reproductives entering. This is especially useful against drywood termites.
7. Remove any wooden debris which might become a source of infestation beneath the building, including scrap wood, form boards, old tree roots, and even sawdust.
8. Fill any crevices or voids where they might help subterranean termites move from the ground to wood in buildings, including foundation cracks, hollow blocks, gaps between stucco and the wall and crevices around pipework. Seal cracks, checks and knotholes, which are favorite accesses for drywood termites.
9. Remove infested stumps and trees near buildings. Arrange for utility companies to remove badly infested poles (particularly upwind of buildings), since these can be a major source of flying drywood termites.
10. Dispose of inexpensive items of furniture infested with furniture termites and check any second-hand furniture prior to purchase.

10 Things Everyone Should Know About Termites

Did You Know?

1. There are over 2,000 known species of termites, of which 55 different species live in the United States.
2. Termites are related to cockroaches and fossil evidence indicates termites are among the world's oldest group of insects-perhaps originating over 250 million years ago.
3. Termites are social insects and live in colonies which often contain thousands of individuals and in some species over 1 million.
4. Each colony contains a queen termite which produces the young and may live 15 years or more.
5. Queen termites are the only insects which grow after becoming adults. This growth relates to increasing egg production, which may exceed 1,000 eggs per day in some species.
6. Termites mostly eat wood or wood products such as paper, but they can also destroy clothing and leather. Some species cultivate and eat fungi.
7. Subterranean termites mostly invade buildings from nearby nests in the ground, but other types can enter by flying or by being introduced in infested firewood, lumber and furniture.
8. A colony of subterranean termites containing 300,000 workers can eat wood equivalent to 20 linear feet of two-by-four in one year.
9. In general it takes 3 to 8 years for subterranean termites to cause extensive structural damage, but the Formosan subterranean termite, which is now a pest in some states, can cause severe damage in only 3 months.
10. In the

United States, termites are estimated to cause more than \$1 billion in property damage each year.

Appearance and Habits of Termites

Termite colonies have a caste system in which different types of castes of termite perform different functions. Typically there are three castes: reproductives (the king and queen termites, which are initially winged but after swarming lose their wings, mate and produce offspring); workers (these small wingless, blind individuals are the most common type and are responsible for all the wood damage and for feeding the young and other castes); soldiers (these large-headed, wingless, blind termites protect the colony against predators, especially ants). Dampwood and drywood termites have no workers-instead nymphs perform their tasks before developing into soldiers or reproductives.