

Ant Baits: A Least-Toxic Control

267-95

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When faced with an insect pest problem inside the home, too many people reach for an aerosol container. For many ant species, baits are the best management tactic because the entire colony is destroyed. This results in a more permanent solution to their ant problem. In addition, many baits have low toxicity to people and pets.

The trick to using baits is to make sure that the offending ants find the bait, eat it voraciously and take it back to the nest to the queen. If residual insecticide sprays are used, the foraging ants may die before they feed or take the bait back to the nest, counteracting the effectiveness of the bait. Do not use insecticide sprays if you want to bait for ant control. If the bait is attractive to the ants, the entire colony will be destroyed within a few weeks. No insecticide sprays will be necessary!

Not all ant species can be controlled by baits and some baits work better than others. In general, ants that eat a wide variety of foods will be less affected by baits because the bait will comprise a smaller proportion of their food. Sugar-loving ants are the easiest to control.

Sweet-Loving Ants. The easiest ants to control are sweet-loving ants. You can use jelly to increase the ant foraging behavior and make the toxic bait more effective. Apply a ribbon of jelly (1-1/2" x 1/4") to masking tape in the areas where you have seen the offending ants, especially around water sources and window ledge. Masking tape works great because it stays in place and is easy to remove and discard later. Experts say that mint or mint apple jelly seems to be the most attractive to foraging sugar ants. A plastic squeeze bottle with a pointed tip makes a convenient applicator.

Sweet-loving ants should begin feeding on the jelly within a couple hours after bait placement. These "survey stations" can be used to pinpoint areas that should be baited. Experts say to use one survey station for each 50 square feet of living space and each 15-20 feet around the house. This can mean lots of jelly and masking tape; however, later you will be able to use the toxic bait more efficiently and save time and money in the long run.

About two hours after setting out the jelly stations, you should count the number of ants foraging at each

station. If there are more than 10 ants feeding at the station, the toxic bait should be placed at the active site. If there is tape with no feeding ants, the masking tape with jelly ribbon is discarded. The most successful baits are those that contain a slow-acting stomach poison so the foraging ant workers will take the bait back to the queen. We recommend baits with boric acid or hydramethylnon as their active ingredient.

Grease and Protein-Loving Ants. Big-headed ants, little black ants and pavement ants prefer grease and protein; in addition, they will also feed on fruit juices. They respond best to protein/grease baits. A bait recipe from Field Guide for the Management of Structure Infesting Ants is:

- 2 ounces (4 tablespoons) peanut butter
- 3 ounces (6 tablespoons) honey
- 3/4 teaspoon boric acid

There are some commercially available baits (DRAX®-FP) that will also work for grease-loving ants.

Carpenter Ants. Carpenter ants will eat sweets; they also eat a wide variety of other food. Some baits are registered for carpenter ant control; however, they do not work as well as on other ant species.

A baiting technique can be used to locate carpenter ants' nests. Purchase some live crickets at your local pet store. Kill a couple and place them in an area where carpenter ants forage. Within a short time, the workers should locate the crickets and drag them back to the nest. By tracking their movements, it may be easier to find the nest location. Because carpenter ants forage during late afternoon and evening hours, make sure bait is available at this time of the day.

Ant Species Controlled by Baits

- Argentine ants (sweet bait)
- Odorous house ants (sweet bait)
- Small honey ants (sweet bait)
- Pavement ants (sweet and grease baits)
- Little black ants (sweet and grease baits)
- Pharaoh ants (use hydramethylnon bait)
- Big-headed ants (sweet and grease bait)