

Are These Winged Bugs Ants Or Termites?

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Soon there will be a biological explosion that will catch many of us unprepared. Termites will expend much of their reserves in a synchronized symphony whose ultimate goal is to procreate their species. That is, the annual nuptial flights of winged, virgin reproductive

termites will occur.

These swarmers look a lot like winged ants. However, there are some basic differences. Ant forewings are longer than their hind wings. Termites have equal sized fore- and hind wings. Ants have a narrow "waist" while termites have no such constriction. Additionally, ants have elbowed antennae, while termite antennae look like a string of beads with no right angle bends.

Once a nuptial flight occurs, male and female reproductive termites fly upward and mate. After which the female drifts down to the ground, her wings fall off, and she burrows into the ground to start a new colony. Few are successful, but termites make up for this low success rate by releasing so many swarmers that the few that are successful are enough to keep the species healthy.

Termites cause millions of dollars in damage to our possessions every year. Feeding mostly on wood, they also feed on cellulose found in books, grasses, insulation, even the paper found on the surface of drywall. If it is cellulose, they will eat it. Termites cannot digest cellulose directly but are dependent upon the bacteria in their gut to break down the indigestible cellulose into compounds that termite physiology can use.

There is a common saying around here that there are two types of houses, those that have termites and those that are going to have termites. How do you know if your home is infested? Common signs to look for are mud tubes that extend from the ground to the wooden portion of the house. These tubes can be easy to locate, or they can be hidden inside basements, in cracks in the foundation or even up the inside

of hollow bricks. If you cannot find mud tubes but swarming termites are inside your house, that is a sure sign of infestation.

Controlling termite infestations is generally best left to professionals. However, it is a good idea to know a little about treatment methods. There are two basic control strategies: baits and soil applied liquid termiticides.

Generally, baiting strategies are to surround the structure with small in-ground stations baited with cardboard, soft wood or some other type of cellulose that termites prefer along with a slow-acting pesticide that the termites eat and carry back to the colony to share with other termites. Typically, these stations are monitored monthly as a part of a contractual agreement between the property owner and a pest control company.

The standard treatment for soil applications for years was applications of chlordane. However, the EPA banned its use in 1988. More recently, newer, less environmentally destructive pesticides have been developed. Termidor® (fipronil), Phantom® (chlorfenapyr), and Premise® (imidacloprid), among others, are available for the professional exterminator to apply as soil treatments.

When soil termiticides are applied, it is generally best to have a "complete" treatment rather than a "spot" treatment. Complete treatments are complex applications where pesticide is applied in a trench around the perimeter of the entire foundation (inside and out, and if the foundation consists of hollow blocks, inside the blocks as well). Additionally, pesticide is pressure applied by rodding down to the base of the foundation or basement. The pesticide must also be applied underneath concrete slabs, generally by drilling holes into the slab and forcing the pesticide underneath. Complete applications are often expensive.

Spot treatments are not as complete and are less expensive. Yet, they can be an effective control measure if a non-repellant pesticide is used and the treatment is directed in the areas where the termites are located. Δ

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