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The Pest Bulletin

A Top Concern

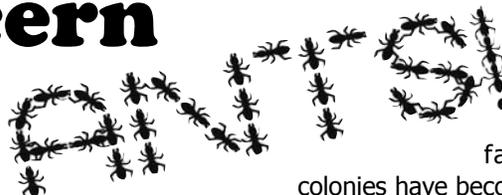
Survey after survey shows that more people have problems with ants than any other pest. It hasn't always been like this, but ants have emerged in recent years as the most common pest plaguing homes.

That's not surprising considering how numerous and common this pest is. There are over 750 different kinds of ants in this country, all with different habits. Some carry diseases and damage wood, and they all have an astonishing ability to search out and quickly find new food sources in homes. Leave out some crumbs or spilled liquid, and if there are ants wandering around, before you know it they will find the food and send an entire column of ants marching to the feast!

Ants have definite preferences as to what they will eat. Most kinds are strongly attracted to

sweet materials, but some prefer high protein foods, or oils, grease and fats, or seeds. And many ants switch their food preferences—favoring sweets exclusively for a while, then totally ignoring sweets and eating other foods.

Ants can invade your home at any time. They are most often looking for food and water, but some invade whenever the weather turns too wet, hot, or cold outdoors. Many ant colonies start aggressively searching for food indoors



during the summer and fall because their colonies have become large and they may be looking for more food sources.

Ant problems don't go away on their own. So if you or a friend or relative have ants coming inside, be sure to keep counters clean, seal food containers, and empty trash regularly, and call us to expertly control these common and troublesome pests.

Insects are Ready for Their Spring Comeback!

Just like Arnold Schwarzenegger dominously declaring "I'll Be Back!" in the movie Terminator, insect problems that may have gone away in the winter are almost guaranteed to start coming back again in the spring, even after an especially harsh winter.

For many pests, surviving cold weather is not at all a problem. Overwintering insects outdoors stay in protected places, such as cracks, crevices and other openings in the exterior of homes, and under bark, rocks, and debris on the ground. In the winter many insects go into a kind of hibernation that helps protect them, where the fat content of their bodies increases and the amount of water decreases. Even more vital—their bodies start producing their own glycerol, which acts as a protective



antifreeze in their blood.

Many insects overwinter outdoors as eggs, which are often surprisingly cold-resistant. But some insects survive the winter as larvae, pupae, or adults.

Ant and bee colonies survive by clustering together to help regulate their temperature. Colonies of yellowjackets and wasps die off in most climates—the only ones that survive are impregnated females that start new colonies in the spring.

Some insects overwinter far inside homes, in wall voids and other cracks and crevices. When warm weather arrives, these pests begin moving about indoors, sometimes in large numbers, looking for a way out. Pests that spend the entire year indoors, like cockroaches and silverfish, can continue reproducing right through the winter, though they may be less active.

Pest Prevention Tip of the Month

Get rid of all standing water in plant saucers, plugged rain gutters, and anywhere else in your yard. Not only can mosquitoes breed in these, but rodents and other animal pests come and drink from them. Change the water weekly in bird baths to prevent mosquitoes from becoming adults in them.



Spiders in Bananas

Are poisonous spiders being imported in shipments of bananas and other international cargo? A recent study in the *Journal of Medical Entomology* looked into this scary problem.

The study found that the spiders most often seen in bananas imported into this country are usually one of two harmless species, the pantropical huntsman spider, and the redfaced banana spider.

Spiders of medical importance in imported bananas are extremely rare. The only ones that have come into this country are called *Brazilian wandering spiders*



(also called banana spiders, or Phoneutria). These are black, hairy spiders, and they can be large, with leg spans up to 2½ inches wide. Their bites on very rare occasions have caused death in their native countries of Central and South America, but usually the bites cause only mild symptoms. And there have been no reports here of anyone being bitten by one of these spiders.

There are many scares of Brazilian wandering spiders coming into the U.S., but during the last 85 years there are only verified records of seven getting here from other countries—six of these were intercepted in bananas, and one in electrical parts.

And what about the famous Harry Belafonte song, "*Day-O (The Banana Boat Song)*", that talks about "the deadly black tarantula" hiding in bunches of bananas? *Tarantulas* are rare in bananas in the countries where they are grown. The song probably refers to Brazilian wandering spiders, not tarantulas at all.

~ The Ebola Virus ~ Transmitted By Insects?

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) believes that insects are not involved in transmission of the Ebola virus. While research shows that transmission from *mosquitoes* is unlikely, medical entomologists are concerned about insects like *flies*. Some species of flies, especially those in Africa, feed on eyes and open wounds of people. It is possible



that these flies can mechanically transmit (not in their saliva or feces, but just on their bodies) the virus. So we are still not sure if insects at times play a role in transmitting this deadly disease.

Sensitivity Varies to Bed Bug Bites

It is well known that some people show *no reaction* to bed bug bites. Others may develop *redness* in the area bitten, or *itching without the welts*, or the *characteristic itchy red welts*. The largest survey ever conducted about bed bug bites was recently published.



People known to be living in premises infested with bed bugs were surveyed in seven cities around the country. Thirty percent said they did not experience any bites. (Note: bed bugs bite everyone equally—it is just the reaction to the bites that varies among individuals.)

The study found that people who reported they were sensitive to mosquito bites were also more sensitive to bed bug bites. *Arms and legs* were the areas of the body that were bitten the most, but people also reported bites on their *chest or back, neck, hands, feet, and face*. Bed bugs have a difficult time biting through most clothing, so bites tend to occur on exposed skin.

Besides the bites, a number of people mentioned bed bugs causing *sleeplessness*, and others mentioned bed bugs causing them *emotional distress, anxiety, and stress*.

Bed bugs often are not discovered until their population has grown, which may mean that the problem has spread into neighboring rooms or apartments. There are many reasons why they are not detected sooner—when so many people (30%) show no reaction to their bites, this complicates early detection. Plus, even with sensitive people, the first bites often produce no reaction—it is only the subsequent bites that start producing reactions. Finally, reactions to bed bug bites seem to take longer than with other insect bites. For some reason the reaction to a bite sometimes is delayed for a week or so, and by that time most people have no idea where they were when bed bugs bit them.



Ants Spread by Ships 500 Years Ago

The number of serious foreign pests that are finding their way into this country has been rising in recent decades. It's not just happening here—due to increased globalization, this is happening all around the world. Although the spread of pests has been increasing, an interesting recent study has been able to document the spread of one serious pest 500 years ago, when sailing ships spread *tropical fire ants* throughout warmer areas of the world.

Tropical fire ants, not to be confused with *red imported fire ants*, are native to our Southeastern states, as well as Mexico and down into South America. Spanish sailing ships during this time were establishing new trading routes. These routes carried goods from Mexico (Acapulco), to the Philippines, and from there to Taiwan, and other areas of Asia and the world.

By studying genetic diversity in tropical fire ants at these locations, it can be seen that these ants originated from Southwestern Mexico, where Acapulco is, and then were carried to the countries where the ships went. The habit of the ships was to fill their ballast with soil, then dump the soil when they reached their destination, and replace it with cargo. By doing this, they were unknowingly moving many pests to new areas of the world.