

# CONTROLLING

# ANTS

## IN YOUR HOME

### 1. Seal the source

- Store food in sealed containers
- Caulk and weatherstrip cracks and gaps

### 2. Bait them

- Use bait stations and sticky traps, which are more effective than sprays
- Choose a bait station with borax (tetraborate decahydrate) or hydramethylnon

### 3. Monitor

- After ants are gone, watch for new ant activity
- To avoid a new ant invasion, spread desiccating dust in areas where you see ants
- Avoid sprays, which only temporarily get rid of ants

Argentine ants are frequent invaders in California homes. Their small size (1/8 inch) allows them to enter the home through cracks and crevices. They typically arrive a few at a time at first (the scouts), and then in long lines, following scent trails to a food source.

### **A QUICK FIX FOR AN ANT EMERGENCY**

1. Find what ants are after (usually food or water) and where they are entering the room (usually through a crack in the wall).

2. Spray lines of ants with soapy water and wipe up. Clean up any food or spills.
3. Block entry points temporarily with a smear of petroleum jelly or a piece of tape.
4. If you can't find an entry point, place a bait station in an out-of-the-way spot on the line the ants have been following. Remember to remove the bait station when the line of ants has disappeared so you don't attract more ants into the house. (See *Tips for Using Ant Baits*.)

Bait stations are much safer for humans, pets, and the environment than sprays. Ants carry small quantities of bait back to the nest to share, reducing the local ant population.

- Use baits with active ingredients borax/tetraborate decahydrate. Bait stations with hydramethylnon should be enclosed.
- Argentine ants change their food preferences frequently. If one bait is not working, try another type. Wait at least a day to see if ants take the bait.

- Place bait stations out of reach from children and pets. Do not spray insecticide around the bait; it will repel the ants.
- Baits may take several weeks to kill the ants. At first you may see more ants coming to the bait, but after a few days to a week you should see fewer ants.
- When ants are gone, remove the bait so you don't attract more ants. Return enclosed bait stations to the original box to save and use again. Put the box inside a sealed plastic bag, and store away from children and pets.



Choose eco-friendly products for your home and garden. Look for this symbol before you buy.

## KEEP ANTS AWAY

- Store food in the refrigerator, or in containers that seal tightly.
- Keep counters and cupboards clean and dry.
- Fix leaking faucets and pipes.
- Weather-strip doors and windows.
- Put pet dishes in a soapy moat—partially fill a wide, shallow container with soapy water and place pet bowls in the water.
- Use silicone caulk to permanently close holes in walls, cracks along moldings and baseboards, and gaps around pipes and ducts to keep ants outside.
- Use a hand duster to apply desiccating dust such as diatomaceous earth (DE) in wall openings and cracks before sealing. DE kills insects by absorbing their outer waxy coating, causing dehydration and death. It has little



While they can be pests, ants are helpful creatures, especially outside. Ants kill and eat many pest insects, help to aerate soil, and recycle animal and vegetable material. This is good news, because it's probably not possible to eliminate ants from their outdoor habitat. The best way to manage an ant invasion is to keep them outside.

## ANTS IN YOUR PLANTS?

If ants are nesting in a potted houseplant, move it outdoors. Water it thoroughly and place the pot in a bucket filled with water that comes an inch below the rim of the pot. Use a stick to make a bridge for ants to get out of the pot and the bucket without getting in the water. The ants will soon begin carrying their white-colored young to safety. When no more ants emerge, drain the pot and return it to the house.

toxicity to humans or pets but inhaling it can cause respiratory problems, so wear a dust mask and goggles when applying. Be sure to buy food-grade DE, not DE for pool filters.

## OUTDOORS

- Follow indoor ant trails back to the spot where ants come in from outside, and place enclosed bait stations there.
- Caulk cracks where ants are entering the home.
- Ants are attracted to honeydew — a sweet, sticky liquid made by aphids, whiteflies, and scale insects. Use sticky barriers around the trunk of a tree or bush to keep ants away while you deal with the source of the honeydew. Prune any branches that touch walls, fences, or the ground so ants cannot get around the barrier.



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**Our Water Our World** (OWOW) is an award-winning partnership between municipal agencies and garden centers and hardware stores that sell pest control products. Initiated in 1998, the program focuses on less-toxic, eco-friendly products and techniques as many common pesticides are harmful to sensitive species and ecosystems when they reach California surface waters.

**Our Water Our World** fact sheets and store displays educate residents about less-toxic pest management. Look for the **Eco-friendly** tag next to less-toxic products in participating stores and nurseries.



**Our Water Our World** is a program of the California Stormwater Quality Association® (CASQA), a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that advances sustainable stormwater management protective of California water resources. CASQA is the registered service mark of the California Stormwater Quality Association®.

Pest control strategies and methods described in this publication are consistent with integrated pest management (IPM) concepts, and are based on scientific studies and tests in actual home and garden settings. Use suggested products according to label directions and dispose of unwanted or leftover pesticides at a household hazardous waste collection facility or event. For more information on pesticide disposal, visit [www.earth911.com](http://www.earth911.com).

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