



ENTFACT- 015

ALLEGHENY MOUND ANTS

Lee Townsend

The Allegheny mound ant is a native species that can be found along the Atlantic coast from Nova Scotia, Canada to Georgia. Known infestations in the Commonwealth range from eastern Kentucky to Franklin, Jefferson, Robertson, and Shelby counties in the central part of the state. In infested areas, mounds tend to be built in pastures that are grazed regularly but not mowed very often. They also can become pests in Christmas tree plantings, nurseries, and turf.

These ants build large mounds at the colony entrance using the soil that they remove as they dig tunnels and chambers deep in the ground. A 5-month-old mound can be about 2 feet wide and 8 inches tall. In about two years, mounds can be up to 3 feet tall. The underground tunnels may go down 3 feet into the soil and extend out to about 4 feet.

In addition to building large mounds, the ants inject surrounding vegetation with formic acid to clear the area. Small trees and shrubs within 40 to 50 feet of large mounds can be killed. Two- to 5-year-old trees near large mounds are especially susceptible to damage but trees up to 8' tall can be killed. If the ants become established in lawns, they can kill the grass around the mound and their hunts for food can make work or play in the area very unpleasant. These ants will bite if the colony is disturbed.

Numbers of mound ants in a colony can increase rapidly. The life cycle from egg to adult takes 2 to 3 months, depending primarily on temperature. Eggs are present during the spring and early summer. The white legless larvae are cared for by workers in tunnels and chambers in the soil.

Numbers of ants associated with different mound diameter are: 6" to 18"- 500 to 3,000; 18" to 36" - 1,000 to 6,000; and 36" to 60" - 3,000 to 10,000. The ant population at a Maryland study site was estimated at 1,200,000 per acre- or about 27 ants per square foot.

Mound ants feed on most any type of small insect or arthropod that they can find as they forage or hunt over the ground. Also, the ants collect the sugar-rich "honey dew" secretions from sap sucking insects such as

aphids and leafhoppers. They rarely enter homes or buildings in search of food.

Allegheny mound ants can be controlled by direct application of a residual insecticide to the mound. A variety of products are labeled for ant control. For best results, the top of the mound should be scraped away with a shovel to expose the large tunnels below it. The ants will pour out of the nest to defend it so be prepared by having on long pants which have been tucked in to socks or boot tops. Use a brush to remove ants that crawl on to you during the operation. After opening a mound, pour in about one gallon of the diluted material per foot of mound diameter so that it soaks into the soil. Repeat the process at each mound.

A process of "budding" results in formation of new mounds as the ants spread out from the original mound. Most new colonies develop in late May and early June. Because of the budding activity from established colonies, there may be small mounds that are easily overlooked. Inspect every year to locate and treat these sites.

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