

ANTS

“I picked ants for my science report ‘cause ants are so cool. They make their own tunnels and gather food in one spot, and lay eggs to make more ants. These ants work hard without even thinking. These ants work much like humans, but they don’t complain about it.” (Trevor John Russell, 11 years old)

Walking down my dirt driveway, during the first warm spell last March, I counted 52 newly emerged ant hills. My counting didn’t include the second driveway, the area around the house or the garden. A week later, most of the mounds had grown impressively larger and a few new ones had sprouted.

These industrious little creatures both impress and alarm me. Though my basic inclination is to leave them alone, I am concerned about letting them reproduce in an unrestrained manner. Besides, some types of ants have a symbiotic relationship with aphids, and aphids are bad or at least annoying bugs that, along with other things, attack new growth on plants, particularly my roses. Ants in my roses as well as the young peach trees irritate me as much as ants biting my toes.

The color of the ants spotted were red, brown and black and quite honestly, I have some resistance to getting familiar enough with them to call them by name and certainly not by the genus name. To consider learning the species type felt like taking on another job that I don’t really need right now. My self-initiated challenge to identify birds, bees and even dragonflies feels sufficient.

With confidence, I can say the ants closest to the house and rose garden were more often the small black ones, the ones further out toward the field were more often red. At the time of this writing, I had not yet seen the large ant types but had no doubt that they would arrive. After all, they had made a happy home here on the ranch last summer.

Quoting from some UC Davis research information, “Ants are one of the most prevalent pests in California. Although ants are annoying when they come indoors, they can be beneficial by feeding on fleas, termites and other pests in the garden. While spraying chemicals inside the house may seem effective, it won’t prevent more ants from entering your home, which is essential for control because most ants nest outside. Focus management efforts on excluding ants from buildings or valuable plants.”

Tips from UC Davis:

- Caulk cracks and crevices that provide entry inside.
- Store attractive food in closed containers.
- Clean up grease and spills.
- Look for and remove indoor nesting sites such as potted plants.

- Ant proof kitchen garbage pails with sticky barriers such as petroleum jelly under the lip and pet dishes by placing them in a moat of water.
- Remove sweet food sources next to your house such as aphid-infested bushes and ripened fruit on trees.

When ants invade your home take these steps:

1. Sponge invaders with soapy water or bleach water as soon as they enter.
2. Plug up ant entryways with caulk or petroleum jelly.
3. Remove infested potted plants.
4. Clean up food sources.
5. Rely on baits to control the ant colony.

Considering the fact that I am not fond of ants, I still appreciate a kids enthusiasm to learn about them.

When my nephew Trevor was asking for idea's to use for a science project, he considered but later turned down my suggestion to study earthworms, coming up with his own idea to learn about ants! After-all, "ants are cool," he said.

An ant house and along with worker ants (queens are not allowed to be sold) were purchased over the net, only to arrive at Trevor's mothers place of work on the same day that the pest controller arrived there to spray for ants.

"You want ants?" the pest control guy said emphatically. "I'll get you ants!"

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