



Termite or 'white ant' treatment and prevention

Termites are sometimes referred to as 'white ants' because of their appearance - this information may assist in detecting and treating these pests.

23 November 2005 | Updated 14 October 2011



A mature queen termite.

Termite or 'white ant' infestations

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Termite or 'white ant' infestations treatment and prevention in homes. Do you have termites in or around your home?

Many insects are confused with termites, especially ants. Termites are sometimes referred to as 'white ants' because of their pale appearance.

The home owner can discourage termites by remembering these facts:

- termites are attracted to wood, so remove potential termite food away from buildings - their food can include timber stacks, old stumps, building refuse, garden decoration such as sleepers and logs
- waste timber from construction activities is often left in place or stored under the house - remove all timber formwork
- timber can be treated to prevent termite attack, and some timbers are naturally resistant - use treated or naturally resistant timber when it is in contact with, or close to, soil
- termites are attracted to water, so fix leaking water pipes, drains, showers, sinks etc, plus capture water from air conditioning units
- termites prefer humid conditions, so keep air under the house dry by improving sub-floor ventilation, drainage and access
- termites cannot chew through properly laid concrete, so ensure concrete slab is properly designed, compacted, and cured
- termite colonies can sometimes be located - it is possible to eliminate colonies by killing the reproductives (the queen and the king).

Regular inspections are the most important part of controlling termites before they do any damage. Therefore:

- arrange regular inspections - at least once a year in cooler areas and twice a year in

Fast facts

- It is no longer legal to treat for termites with organochlorines for environmental and health reasons
- Chemical treatments are only available to licensed pest controllers
- Have a program of regular inspections arranged with a pest controller

Contact Information

CSIRO Enquiries

Phone: 1300 363 400

Alt Phone: 61 3 9545 2176

Email: Enquiries@csiro.au

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[CSIRO's bait box technique for termite control](#)

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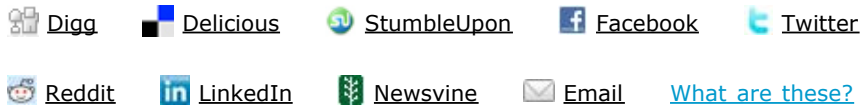
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warmer areas

- inspect during periods of high termite activity - early spring to late summer is generally the best
- keep the edges of the house (slabs, foundation, piers and stumps) clear of clutter, including garden beds and vegetation
- professional pest controllers are trained in inspecting houses for termite activity - use their services
- home owners can inspect houses themselves more frequently than a professional, if they can identify termite activity.

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Prevention

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The first step in protecting a house is to prevent termites from gaining access. This is achieved by placing a barrier under or around the house.

Barriers are designed to deter termites or bring their presence out into the open. Barriers can be physical or chemical in nature.

Physical barriers

Physical barriers are so-called because they rely on the physical resistance of the material to resist termite attack. These are usually installed during new constructions, but some can be retro-fitted to existing houses.

Barriers can be placed under concrete slabs, foundations and within cavity walls. Hardware and building suppliers may be able to advise on products that are available for DIY.

Physical barriers are made from metal, crushed rock or other materials that termites cannot chew through, and in which any gaps are too small for termites to move through. Most of these products have to be installed by professionals that are licensed by the manufacturers.

Ant caps are installed at the top of underfloor piers or stumps to force termites into the open where they are easier to detect during regular inspections. Ant caps are not a barrier by themselves.

Chemical barriers

Chemical barriers are so-called because they rely on a chemical to resist termite attack. The chemicals are usually insecticides. These barriers can be placed under concrete slabs, foundations and around houses.

Chemical barriers can be installed in new and existing structures, but can only be installed by licensed pest controllers.

There are two types of chemical barriers in-soil and in-plastics.

In-soil chemical barriers are formed when the chemical is applied to the soil under or around the foundations of a building.

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Termite mudding over ant cap.

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In-plastic chemical barriers are plastic sheets containing a chemical - these are typically installed like physical barriers.

There are several different chemicals currently registered for use as chemical barriers.

Registration is controlled by Australian Pesticides & Veterinary Medicines Authority.










There are several chemicals used currently (new chemicals are under development and old chemicals can be deregistered, so check with the APVMA for the most up to date information).

The active ingredients include:

- Bifenthrin
- Chlorpyrifos
- Deltamethrin
- Fipronil
- Imidacloprid.

It is no longer legal to use organochlorines for environmental and health reasons.

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Termite pest management and control

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Approved methods of preventative termite control are covered by Australian Standard AS 3660.1 (2000). Remedial termite control is covered by AS 3660.2 (2000). More information is available from Australian Standards, and can be purchased from their website.

It is important to remember that house construction is variable. Consider:

- the type of construction (slab on ground, suspended floors, pole etc)
- the materials used
- soil types
- slopes
- size of house
- size of block
- year of construction.

Australia is a big and varied country, from cooler temperate climates to wet tropical ones. Such variation is important to remember when considering termite control methods. Should one particular method work well for one house, it may not prove appropriate for a second.

Remedial treatment

This is undertaken when an infestation in a house has been identified.

If the nest can be found it may be possible to destroy it directly.

Check any trees, stumps, wood stockpiles or other sites that may harbour termites within 80 metres of the house. The nest can be destroyed by complete removal or by application of a chemical insecticide.

Whether or not the nest can be found, the termites must be prevented from continuing their attack on the house. Therefore remedial treatments generally use chemicals in one form or another.

The chemicals can be applied as:

- barrier treatments
- dusts
- baits.

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Termite workers.

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Barrier treatments

A remedial chemical soil barrier can be applied under and/or around the house in a similar fashion to a preventative chemical soil barrier.

Chemicals can be applied to the infested area inside the house. This can include liquid formulations or dusts. Liquid formulations are similar to those used in chemical soil barriers.

Dusts

Dusts can be applied as stand alone treatments, or as part of a combined approach.

Dusts can only be used by licensed professional pest controllers. The pest controller applies a small amount of dust containing a chemical active ingredient into the wood or area infested by termites (often called the 'termite workings').

The dust settles onto the termites, which then carry the dust back to the nest. The termites clean themselves of the dust and ingest the active ingredient. Grooming is a social activity so the active ingredient is spread throughout the colony.

If enough active ingredient is ingested, then it is possible to eliminate the colony.

Active ingredients in dusts include:

- Arsenic trioxide
- Fipronil
- Triflumuron.

Baits

Baiting systems concentrate termites into a bait station and then feed the termite a bait – a palatable food containing an active ingredient.

The termites collect the bait, return it the colony, and so spread the active ingredient throughout the colony. If enough active ingredient is ingested, then it is possible to eliminate the colony.

There are commercial baiting systems that have the bait included - these are available only from licensed professional pest controllers.

There are do-it-yourself baiting systems (such as the CSIRO bait box), either built by the home owner or by a professional pest controller. In either case the bait must be applied by a professional pest controller.










Bait systems can be applied as stand alone treatments, or as part of a combined approach. Bait systems can form part of the inspection of a house, acting as a continuous monitoring system.

Active ingredients in baits include:

- arsenic trioxide
- hexaflumuron
- noviflumuron
- chlorfluazuron.

Note: Chemical treatments are only available to licensed pest controllers.

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