

Learn to Identify Termites, Protect Your Home



Drywood termite fecal pellets

BARTOW

This is the month when you may begin to see evidence of termites in or around your home. People often have trouble distinguishing termites from ants. There are, however, distinct differences. Termites have two sets of equally sized wings, beaded antennae and the abdomen is broadly joined to the thorax. Ants have elbowed antennae, two sets of different sized wings and the connection between the abdomen and thorax is constricted.

Subterranean termites

There are many species of termites, but you only need to be concerned with two general types: the dry wood termite and the subterranean termite. At this time of the year, you may see swarms of subterranean winged adults both indoors and outdoors. They select a mate, fall to the ground and search for a site to start a new colony. The male and female adults remain together for many years with the female laying thousands of eggs.

Subterranean termites are everywhere in the landscape and feed on any type of woody material in the soil such as buried wood, dead roots, mulch, etc. They will feed on any mulch containing wood. Melaleuca mulch seems to be the least attractive. The worker termites need high moisture to live and will quickly die when exposed to outside air. However, they can construct mud tubes above the soil that enable them to travel up exterior walls and into buildings through cracks without becoming desiccated.

Subterranean termites are present in most residential landscapes. The presence of the little white worker termites in mulch, in rotting logs or swarming adults outside of your home does not necessarily mean that they will eventually infest your house, but of course it is possible. However, if you see winged adults flying in your house, then you probably have an infestation which will need treatment.

Termite infestations need to be treated by a professional. Call two to three reputable companies for a free inspection. If you have questions, call the extension office. Left untreated, a large subterranean colony can eat up to one pound of wood per day - or 365 pounds per year. There are excellent soil insecticides and bait treatments available for control of subterranean termites. This treatment should give your house five or more years of protection from termites. Be sure to ask the company about the warrantee.

Drywood termites

Drywood termites will infest dry wood, as the name implies, and are not associated with soil. They need only minimal amounts of moisture, which they readily find in rafters. They exist in separate small colonies and are not as destructive as subterranean termites; however lack of treatment can lead to serious structural problems. They also have mating flights like subterranean termites. The mating pair searches for suitable wood to infest, which might be another rafter in your attic.

The treatment for drywood termites is altogether different from subterranean termites as the infestation is an aerial one not associated with soil, so it is critical to identify the winged adults or the type of damage. Another identifying characteristic of drywood termites is the presence of fecal pellets, which they push out of the infested wood. The pellets are small, not powder-like; can be different colors, even red and white depending on the wood; and have indentations on the sides. If you are unsure of the type of infestation you have, bring a sample to the extension office and I will examine it.

The treatment of choice is tenting. The structure is enclosed in a plastic tarp. After the tarp is secured, a volatile gas is pumped into the structure. The gas penetrates the wood and kills the termites. There is no residual with the gas treatment, so future re-infestation is possible. There are other less expensive treatments in which the suspected wood is drilled and an insecticide is injected into the void occupied by the termites. The problem with the drilling treatment is that colonies can be missed.

What can you do around your home to lessen the chances of a termite infestation?

Do not leave wood scraps in your yard. Do not place mulch up against the foundation of your house. Repair leaky hose bibs. Direct sprinklers away from the house. Stucco or veneer exterior finishes should be six to eight inches above grade so you can see bare concrete block. Subterranean termites will travel up from the soil behind stucco and veneers and into the house. Do not disturb soil around foundation as this may impact previous termite treatments. Watch for drywood termite fecal pellets. Repair screens and caulk cracks and crevices in the structure. Keep shrubs at least two to three feet away from foundation - termites will travel under foundations following tree roots.

Contributed by David Shibles, University of Florida IFAS Extension

Posted – Polk Voice - **February 5, 2007 10:47:04 AM**

Images



drywood termite fecal pellets



winged subterranean termite adult



subterranean mud tube

1