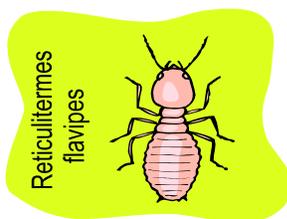


Bug-Wise

No. 2

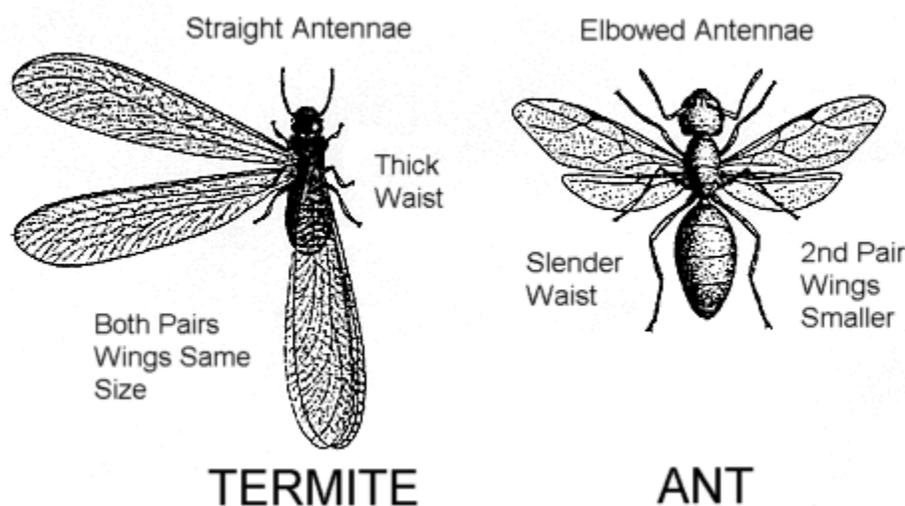
March 1, 2004

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Termite Swarming Time: Termites normally go un-noticed most of the year, because they are hidden in the soil and wood in which they are feeding. However, when they swarm in early spring, termites often dramatically reveal their presence, creating concern among homeowners and prompting calls to Extension offices and Pest Control Companies.

These swarmers, which are the male and female reproductive forms, look distinctly different from the white-colored workers and soldiers, which are wingless and never venture outside their galleries or tunnels. The dark-colored swarmers have two pair of equal sized wings, which they lose after making a short dispersal flight. Termite swarmers are often mistaken for winged ants, but ants can be easily distinguished from termites by their pinched waist, elbowed antennae, and the fact that the rear wings are smaller than the forewings.



Eastern subterranean termites, which are by far our most common species, swarm from late February through mid-May, with swarms normally beginning during the morning hours. The less common Formosan subterranean termite swarms at night, during May and June (Formosan swarmers are also lighter in color than eastern subterranean termite swarmers). Just before the swarm begins, worker termites make one or more openings in the wood or soil in which they are tunneling. Upon a given signal, hundreds, or even thousands, of swarmers will emerge from these openings and take flight. This mass emergence of winged termites is a rather dramatic, short-lived event that normally lasts no more than 15 to 30 minutes. The dispersal flights are normally short range. Upon falling to the ground, the male and female termites will form pairs, lose their wings, and attempt to establish a new colony.

Does observing a swarm of termites around a home indicate that the home is infested with termites? Not necessarily. It depends on where the swarm was observed. Eastern subterranean termites are normal inhabitants of Mississippi woodlands and most home lots, at least those with significant numbers of trees, have native populations of termites. Therefore, **a swarm that is observed emerging from a location in the yard, away from the foundation of the home is no cause for alarm.** However, a swarm that is observed emerging within a few feet of the foundation of the house should be viewed differently. The colony that produced that swarm may be feeding in a stump or other wood source that is not associated with the house, or it may be infesting the house. **Swarms that emerge inside the house are a sure sign that the home has an active termite infestation.** Occasionally homeowners actually witness these indoor swarms, but more often they are detected after the fact, when dead swarmers are found in windowsills and on floors.

What should I do if I observe swarming termites? If you observe swarming termites in or near the home, the first step is to have the home inspected by a licensed Pest Control Company. If you already have a termite control contract with a particular company, then this is the company you need to contact. If you do not have a termite contract in place on the home, it is best to contact several companies and get bids, both for the price of an inspection and a treatment/contract, as well as getting information on the type of services that the company provides. After considering this information, one can make a better-informed choice. This is an important decision, because, if the home is infested it will need to be treated and termite treatments/contracts are costly and involve a long-term relationship with the company providing the treatment/contract.

How quickly do I need to act? After finding swarming termites in the home, one often feels a need to rush into action. However, don't allow this sense of urgency to cause you to make hasty and potentially costly decisions. If a termite infestation does exist, it definitely needs to be controlled. But termites eat wood rather slowly, and taking a few weeks to gather information on pest control companies and treatment options, in order to make an informed decision, won't make that much difference in either the amount of damage sustained or the difficulty of inspection and control.

Currently there are a number of different methods of treating termite infestations. These include the use of in-ground bait stations, or the application of insecticide barrier treatments, as well as a number of other methods. There are also a number of different insecticides that may be used to treat for termites. Available space does not allow detailed discussion of these different treatment options. For more information on subterranean termites and their control contact your local Extension Office and request a copy of Mississippi State University Extension **Publication 531**, Pest Management Practices for Home and Landscape: Subterranean Termite Control. This publication is also accessible by going to www.msucares.com, clicking on 'Publications' and entering 'termites' in the search box.

Bug-Wise Mailing List: If you know anyone who would like to receive the Bug-Wise newsletter, please send their name and address to Bug-Wise, Box 9775, Mississippi State, MS 39762. We anticipate publishing approximately 15 issues of Bug-Wise yearly, on an irregular, as-needed basis.