



Prince Edward County Master Gardeners Ants in The Garden



The most common ants in Ontario are: Pavement Ants, Black Ants, and Fire Ants.



Pavement Ant



Black Ant



Fire Ant

Ants outdoors are generally simply part of the environment during the warmer months. The occasional stinging ants' nest and poorly located ants' nests in terms of human activity are often less acceptable. Dry, sandy soils are more likely to be infested with ants than a rich loamy soil in which most plants thrive. Ants, in a gardening area, may just need to be encouraged to relocate by enriching the soil in which they are found. Leaving the soil as is but destroying the nest or nests is likely to leave the area open to a return of this type of ant and a new nest.

An ant nest located near an outdoor sitting or eating area can be dug up and relocated at a distance. The ants will complete the reorganization once most of their colony has been relocated. I suppose from the ants' perspectives the human eating area can be relocated as well. The decision, however, does not rest with the ants.

Furthermore ants make their own contributions to a well functioning garden. Like earthworms their underground movements help aerate the soil. They break down various vegetable and animal matter and add to our soil. While they are not essentially predators they will destroy pests simply because they are in their path and can be viewed as sustenance. They will also care for some butterfly larvae because they emit sweet sticky substances that they will consume. Therefore gardens function better with most types of ants present rather than not.

If you have stinging ants, like Fire Ants in a location with a lot of human interaction you will certainly want to rid yourselves of them and relocating does not seem like a smart option. If Borax (boric acid) and sugar*** does not work to close down the nest, you might want to try boiling water for a faster fix. Whether you need to destroy other ant nests is a personal choice depending on tolerance and location but be prepared to do it more than once. Ants are likely to be more persistent than humans and there are clearly lot more of them to carry out the task.

For more gardening advice contact us at pecmastergardeners@gmail.com

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*** Mix 50/50 Borax (from the laundry aisle) with sugar, put in a shaker that you make from an old coffee jar with a screw on lid with holes punched in it. Or an old flour shaker. This allows you to shake a little over ant hills or places you see ants, door steps where they are getting in the house, over plants that are being destroyed by ants in the roots. It doesn't affect plants or soil and you only need a little. You have to do it again after rain. How it works is the ants take the sugar back to feed the queen, because the queen doesn't leave the nest. Resist the urge to kill all the ants you see. ***