

Termites and Ants Are Swarming

by Jane Morse, University of Florida/IFAS Manatee County Extension Agent

Is it an ant or a termite? The easiest way to tell if it's an ant or a termite is to look for a waist. Ants have narrow waists while termites are straight bodied. Ants also have bent antennae and their front wings are longer than their hind wings, whereas termites have straight antennae and wings of equal size that are twice as long as the termite body.

The main three types of termites in Florida are the subterranean (nest in soil), dampwood and drywood (nest in wood).

Subterranean termites cause the most damage and are the most commonly found termite in Florida. Most subterranean termites swarm in the spring, but the Florida darkwing swarms from July to September. The termites that swarm are the alates, which are the sexual reproductives, and they have wings. After a brief flight they shed their wings and male/female pairs start looking for a new place to nest. Swarms in a house or finding a pile of wings mean the house is probably infested. Mud tubes along the house foundation or anywhere inside a house are another good clue that the house is infested.

Drywood termites have peak swarming from January through May, but can swarm during other months too. It is a good idea to leave outside lights off during their peak swarming times because the termites are attracted to the light. A good place to check for drywood termites is on window ledges. You may see wings laying on the window ledge, or you may see their droppings which will look like a pile of fine sawdust. These droppings are about the size of sand and are straw-colored to reddish-brown. Infestations are most common in the attic or window frames and sills. Surface blisters are a sign of advanced infestation. Swarms, or piles of wings in the house are a bad sign.

Dampwood termites are larger than the drywood or subterranean and they nest in damp wood. Some ways to tell if they are around is by the sawdust looking droppings or muddy droppings in wet areas. Since all termites damage wood, tapping wood every few inches with the handle of a screwdriver can detect damage. Damaged wood sounds hollow.

Subterranean and drywood termites require different treatment methods, so it is very important to determine what type of termite is found. Be sure to collect as many wings as

possible for identification. Immediately contact a pest control company or bring a sample to the Extension Service for identification.

If drywood termite damage is localized, it may be controlled by removing and replacing the damaged wood or by the application of an insecticide. Extensive and advanced infestations will require tenting so the whole building can be fumigated. Subterranean termites will require soil treatment with pesticides around and under house foundations, or termite baits.

For more in-depth information on this subject, call the University of Florida/IFAS Manatee County Extension Service at 722-4524 and ask to speak to a Master Gardener (available Monday-Friday, 9 AM to 4 PM). We have several **free** publications about termites and control options.

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