

Some Anti- Ant Remedies

I had a problem in my unit for a number of years with ants. At its height I had a snaking trail of the wretched insects some summers from my patio entrance to the kitchen. As a former behavioural biologist here are some suggestions for Ant Control 101.

The main reason ants are difficult to eliminate:

- 1) In colder months ants look for somewhere warm to over-winter.
- 2) You may not have a patio or even a garden, but ants can migrate into your unit from neighbouring ones (their units may have been “pest controlled”, or be less inviting than your own).
- 3) You can bring ants into your unit through potted nursery plants.
- 4) Once you have ants in your unit and they find a source of food, you are not doomed forever to host them. I have a 34th floor unit, with a patio garden, and had ant problems year round for several years after moving in almost 20 years ago. Every time I eliminated the problem, the ants came back, until finally I eliminated all recurrences some 10+ years ago. Some of the recurrences were caused by problems with RWTC issues with the outer cladding (multiple exterior to interior leaks), which resulted in my patio wall garden being repeatedly emptied and the soil piled up against our inner patio wall). Disturbed ants equal ant migrations. In addition, the cable company installing wiring had drilled holes through my external walls. So ants were coming in through the baseboard areas courtesy of redistributed soil, and cable entrance holes.
- 5) There is an available food source (ants will eat almost anything). Foraging ants identify food sources and then advertise them to their colleagues by laying a scent (pheromone) trail that will lead all other ants to it. If you have pets, feeding bowls are alluring, pet birds can scatter fruit and seed morsels – all ant attractive. Messy humans with snacking habits that leave crumb trails or dirty counter tops can all be desirable.

What Did I Do to Eliminate my Ant Problem Permanently

- 1) I eliminated potential food sources.
 - a. All pet food cleaned up after meals (I have a messy parrot so this meant vacuuming and wiping surfaces down up to 6+ times a day)
 - b. Make sure if humans snack they do so over a tray or plate – kids are no problem just have a portable hand vacuum at the ready. Ensure all countertops and floors are crumb and food residue free.
 - c. Do not leave opened containers of foodstuffs, human or pet, anywhere in the unit.
 - d. Do not dump dirty, unwashed cooking pans or utensils in the sink, or elsewhere in the unit.
 - e. Disrupt the scent trails that encourage ants to converge on food sources.
 - i. Use bicarbonate of soda, or baking powder, based perfumed carpet cleaning products. Sprinkle the powder over the trail paths primarily, but also at entry

points (e.g. in my case along the carpet adjacent to the patio windows/doors and outside the kitchen door.) Scented talcum powder can sometimes work too.

- f. Use bleach or strong smelling disinfectant on all kitchen countertops, doors to cupboards, floors, etc. If this presents a problem, you can use either white or apple cider vinegar in a spray bottle, and spritz the areas where you have seen ants.
 - g. Dump garbage promptly.
 - h. Mint (you can use as gum), whole cloves, and cinnamon sticks also scramble an ant's sense of smell – they can be repelled by these substances. Place in drawers, cupboards, etc. where you have found ants.
- 2) Seal up with caulking any gaps which you observe ants using (I sealed up the holes the cable guys had drilled and gaps between my sink units and the pipes to neighbouring units.) I also sprinkled commercial ant powder along the edge of my outside patio where it abutted onto my exterior unit walls.
- 3) Borax ant killer. Borax (Sodium borate) is used in detergents, and as a laundry booster (water softener - purchasable in some supermarkets and hardware stores, but not always easy to find in the laundry aisle – Loblaws sometimes stocks it at around \$6 for 2Kg). It is also used in some cosmetics and teeth bleaching products, and in several countries as a food preservative (e.g. caviar - banned in N. America). Borax is toxic to ants.

If ants are climbing up inside your (say) sink water pipes, sprinkle a small amount of borax **around** the entire **dry** drain hole (best to do this last thing at night, or just before you leave the unit in the morning). Do NOT use the sink thereafter, unless you repeat the treatment. Repeat regularly. Scalding water poured down the drain before using the borax can help kill any climbing ants, as can bleach to disrupt scent trails.

Since destroying an established infestation will probably require using several of the methods mentioned so far, one can also use baiting. There are a number of recipes, some of which are messy and wet. You can make your own dry bait by mixing equal parts of borax, with fine powdered sugar and some dry active yeast (about one-third of the total volume). Place it in a small box (I have used open matchboxes). Place the boxes wherever you see ants. They will carry the “food” back to their brethren who will then ingest it and die. Ants spend a lot of time not only grooming themselves, but fellows too – result the ants ingest the poison and die. Also borax can scratch the ants' exoskeletons (“skin”) which can hasten death.

(Baking soda can apparently be substituted for the borax for equal effect).

- 4) Vacuum all floors promptly to remove any food residues.