

PEST ANTS

Note: DPIPWE has also published fact sheets on

Pest ants

How to identify pest ants

Argentine ant

Tramp ants

Tramp ant is a phrase used for the various ant species that travel the globe. Some insects are good at hitch-hiking in nursery plants, freight and machinery and at colonising new places. They are often helped in this, unwittingly, by humans.

Tramp ants often form adjoining, cooperative super-nests with multiple queens, rather than disperse to independent, single-queen nests by mating flights. Over 160 species of ants have moved outside their native ranges in various parts of the world, although not all rank as tramp ants or have become serious pests.

Argentine ant, *Linepithema humile*, is the most notable example of a tramp ant in Tasmania. It first appeared here in 1951 but was eradicated. It reappeared in 1972 and eradication failed by the late 1970s, so it is no longer a notifiable pest. For information on control of Argentine ant, visit the [DPIPWE website](#).

Red imported fire ant (RIFA) – a tramp ant in Brisbane

This South American ant invaded southern USA in 1930 and Brisbane, Australia in 2001. It is not a major agricultural threat but is a serious nuisance and health hazard in urban areas because these small ants sting in numbers. This can make gardens difficult to use. Some people have severe allergic reactions to the stings.

Since RIFA appeared in Brisbane nine years ago, there has been a major campaign to eradicate it, employing hundreds of people and costing many millions of dollars. New Zealand has eradicated a couple of outbreaks.

The climate in Tasmania is marginal for establishment of red imported fire ant. It prefers warmer places. Even in Brisbane, it becomes inactive during the cool months. However, overseas experience shows RIFA can adapt to cooler weather and so must be considered a threat to Tasmania.

Tasmania maintains quarantine restrictions on imports and conducts annual surveys around ports to reduce the risk of RIFA establishing in the state. Because the ants nest in soil, the restrictions target the movement of soil, landscaping materials and other risky objects that might carry soil, such as machinery, vehicles, hay and forage.

An ant that is sometimes mistaken for RIFA is the banded sugar ant. These ants are both harmless and native to Australia. They can give you a give a harmless nip but not a painful or dangerous sting. Workers of this ant typically emerge at dusk and build untidy soil mounds along paths. Banded sugar ants (12 mm) are similar in colour to RIFAs (2-6 mm) but are much larger.

If you are stung *multiple* times by many *small* ants in Tasmania you may have been the first person to encounter RIFA locally. Please report it to quarantine authorities.

American carpenter ants – a quarantinable ant

[American carpenter ants](#) (black or dark brown and around 10mm long) are of the genus *Camponotus*. They don't have the typical tramp ant profile with a history of invasion, but they are highly destructive of both sound and unsound timber and therefore a pest deserving quarantine awareness.

American carpenter ants occasionally arrive with shipments of Oregon timber from the USA but have not established in Australia. Infested timber is fumigated whenever it is detected during quarantine inspections.

There are also large (10mm long) black ants of the same genus *Camponotus* that are native to Australia. They will nest in rotten house timber such as window sills decayed by dampness. A smaller (8mm long) black ant of the genus *Camponotus* sometimes nests in ceilings clad with western red cedar and can cause wood-dust to fall.

However, unlike their large American carpenter ant relatives, these native species do not extensively excavate sound timber.

The native, harmless, nocturnal sugar ants also belong to the genus *Camponotus* and have similar size and shape as carpenter ants. However, they are not all-black and don't nest in wood.

Tropical tramp ants under eradication

In 2006, [electric ant](#), *Wasmannia auropunctata*, of Central and South America appeared in north Queensland. Several years earlier, [yellow crazy ant](#), *Anoplolepis gracilipes*, of subtropical Argentina appeared in NT and Queensland. Both species are subjects of eradication campaigns in Queensland.

Other tropical tramp ants in Australia

Other tramp ants have established (ie are beyond eradication) in Australia but not Tasmania. Most are unlikely to thrive in Tasmania's cool climate but some could become pests in large, heated buildings and glasshouses. These include

- [Longhorn crazy ant](#), *Paratrechina longicornis* of Africa/Asia
- [Singapore ant](#), *Monomorium destructor*, originally from India
- [Pharaoh's ant](#), *Monomorium pharaonis* originally from West Africa
- [Tropical fire ant or ginger ant](#), *Solenopsis geminata* originally from Central America.

Temperate tramp ants not yet in Australia

There are some other ants, not present in Australia, with more temperate climate profiles that could be accidentally introduced to Tasmania. These include

- Wood ants, *Formica* species, are restricted to the northern hemisphere. They are not frequently intercepted in the southern hemisphere and don't seem to establish easily outside their native ranges. However, the related ant, *Lasius neglectus* of Asia has recently spread through the Mediterranean and Central Europe. It is often found in fixed electrical equipment.

- Little black ant, *Monomorium minimum* originates in southern Canada and northern USA and established in Malaysia. In the USA it coexists with Argentine ant.
- European fire ant, *Myrmecia rubra* originates in temperate areas and invaded USA around 1906 but is not frequently intercepted in the southern hemisphere.
- *Paratrechina flavipes* is related to longhorn crazy ant but has a more temperate native distribution in Asia and a track record of invading USA, Spain and United Arab Emirates. It likes moist forests.
- *Paratrechina vividula* is another relative of longhorn crazy ant. It is native to Mexico and Texas, but has spread north to Canada and into Europe.
- Odorous house ant, *Tapinoma sessile*, is a temperate North American ant with many features of the tramp ant profile but has so far only spread to Malaysia.
- Pavement ant, *Tetramorium caespitum*, is a temperate European ant that became a house pest in eastern USA and Canada. *Tetramorium rhenanum* is a related European ant that has become an environmental pest in the USA.

If you see something you think might be a pest ant

If you think you have come across ants that might be foreign to Tasmania, please contact 03 6233 3352 or 1800 084 881 and the state quarantine service will investigate.

DPIPWE's fact sheet "How to identify a Pest Ant" may help you decide whether to report your sighting. If in doubt, please report the sighting anyway. We really do not mind investigating reports that turn out not to be pest ants.

Disclaimer: While all care has been taken to ensure that information contained in this fact sheet is true and correct at the time of publication, the Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment gives no warranty or assurance, and makes no representation as to the accuracy of any information or advice contained in this publication, or that it is suitable for your intended use. No business or investment decisions should be made in reliance on this information without obtaining independent/or professional advice in relation to your particular situation.