



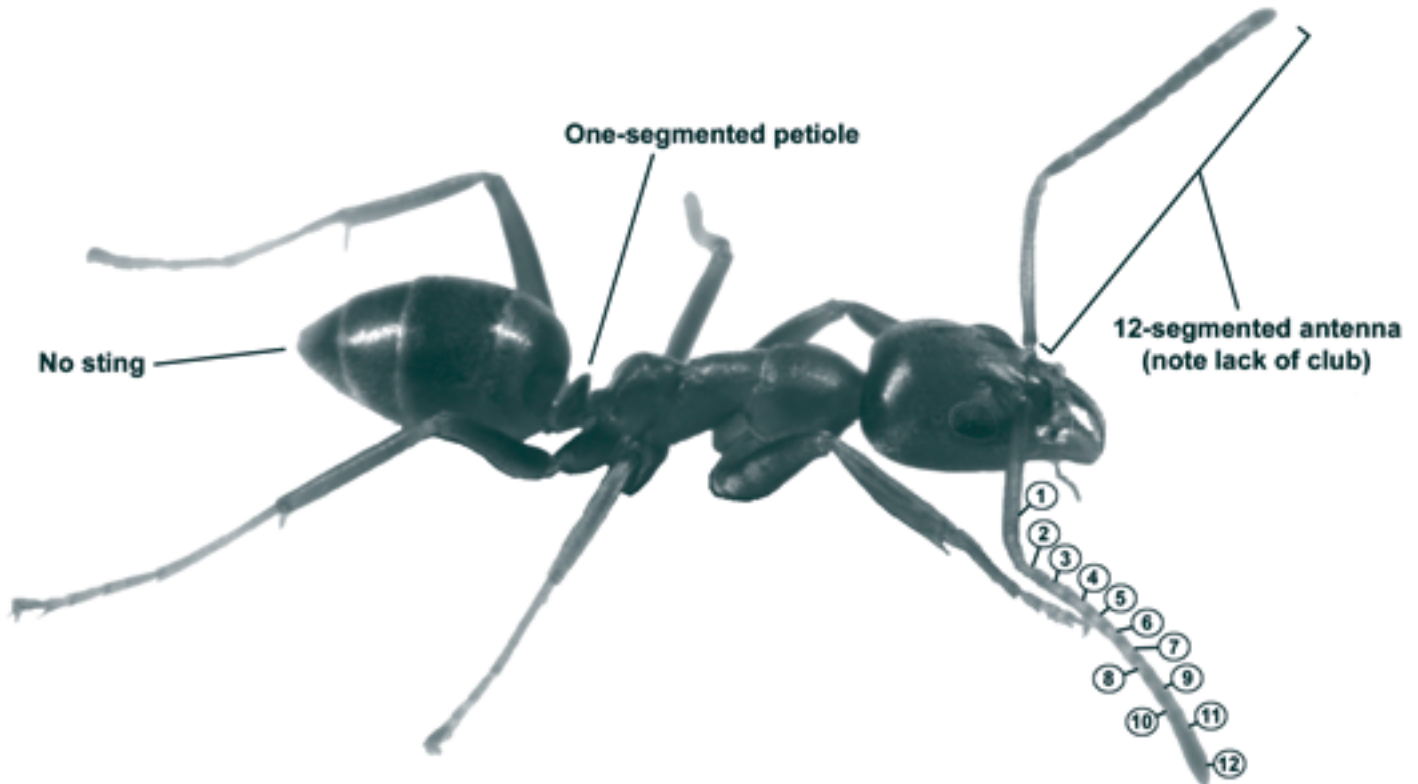
# BUG BIZ

Pest Management and Insect Identification Series



## Managing Argentine Ants in Louisiana

Identifying Characteristics of the Argentine Ant (*Linepithema humile*):



*This brown to black ant goes into houses and trees on organized foraging trails. Photo by Michael Seymour*

### General Information

The Argentine ant, an exotic species brought to New Orleans from South America in the late 1800s, is found throughout the state after being transported in nursery stock and by cars, boats and RVs. Their huge colonies, with millions of workers and hundreds of queens, extend for miles.

Argentine ants forage in trees to “tend” plant-feeding insects such as aphids and scales, but they also forage on the ground. They nest

under rocks, fallen branches, mulch and at the base of trees.

They are a nuisance, but do not sting. They enter houses, cars, boats and recreational vehicles en masse for food, water and shelter. This ant is extremely difficult to control, because it is so nomadic. It can be managed only on an areawide or communitywide basis. Because colonies are so large, with so many queens and workers, it takes cooperation to manage them effectively.

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## Areawide Management

Areawide or communitywide management of fire ants has been successful in Louisiana in the last six years. LSU AgCenter researchers have modified the techniques they developed for fire ant management and have applied them to the Argentine ant problem. The following program is specific to Argentine ants and is the result of five years of LSU AgCenter research. The protocol must be followed by all residents in an area at the same time. April 1-15 is the best time. It is important to disrupt the populations before they get too large and out of control. Contact your neighbors and tackle this problem together. If you have questions, contact Dr. Dale Pollet at (225) 578-2180.

**1. Disrupt the foraging into trees and houses.** Using a contact insecticide such as a pyrethroid or an organophosphate in a handheld pump or back-pack sprayer, apply a liquid barrier around trees about 2 feet up and 1 foot out from the base of the tree on which the ants are trailing and around infested houses. Be sure to treat all surfaces of the bark of the trees, and try to treat all the trees on your property at the same time. Drench with pesticides any ant nests you see. If possible, adjust the pH of the water to 5.5-6.6 for sprays and drenches. The drenching of the visible nests will reduce the number of ants that require bait. Be sure to trim trees so that they do not touch your house or shed.

If you have large nests with huge trails going up a tree, wrap a piece of material (batting, cotton, etc.) tightly around the tree. Then drench the material with the liquid contact insecticide.

**2. Let them eat bait.** Many nests are hard to detect, so baiting lets the foraging ants do the work of gathering the bait and bringing it to the nest. Broadcast a granular bait such as Max Force® (1.5 pounds per acre) in the early spring. The bait attracts the ants and has an ingredient that poisons them. It is important to use fresh bait and apply it when the ground is dry and no rain is expected for 24 hours. Broadcast bait over your entire property. Liquid baits can be offered in bait stations, too. Ants will usually visit these stations when they need sugars or carbohydrates and may come to them intermittently. Be sure to place the bait stations out of direct sunlight; ants will not enter a hot bait station.

## Tips for success:

Reduce the cost of bait by sharing a large batch of bait with neighbors. Schedule a weekend for everyone to treat at the same time. Be sure to use fresh bait that has not been stored with other insecticides or chemicals. Avoid smoking while applying the bait; ants do not like the smell of cigarettes. Try to apply the bait as evenly as possible with a hand-held spreader. Follow label instructions, and keep bait and contact insecticides out of water systems.

## Cultural Controls

Look around the yard for areas that will harbor Argentine ant colonies. If harborage is eliminated, you can use less insecticide to suppress colonies. Harborage can protect the ants from winter freezes and insecticidal treatments that can suppress them. Some examples are: boat seats, overturned canoes or kayaks, dead stumps, dead or felled trees, children's toys, free-standing basketball nets, woodpiles and lawn tools. These items also provide extra heat for rapid development of colonies, which can overwhelm the yard quickly.

Trim plants and trees so that they do not touch structures. Ants can gain entry into structures from tree branches that are close to the roof. Argentine ants are very attracted to moist spaces and rotting wood. Rotting wood provides moisture and heat needed for colony reproduction. To prevent infestation, consider replacing rotting siding, window sills and door frames. Look for ground-to-wood contact around structures, and find a way to eliminate this problem (this may also prevent new termite infestations). The next time it rains, walk around the property and look for water that may pool or contact the wood. Eliminating water-soaked wood will help prevent ant infestations.

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