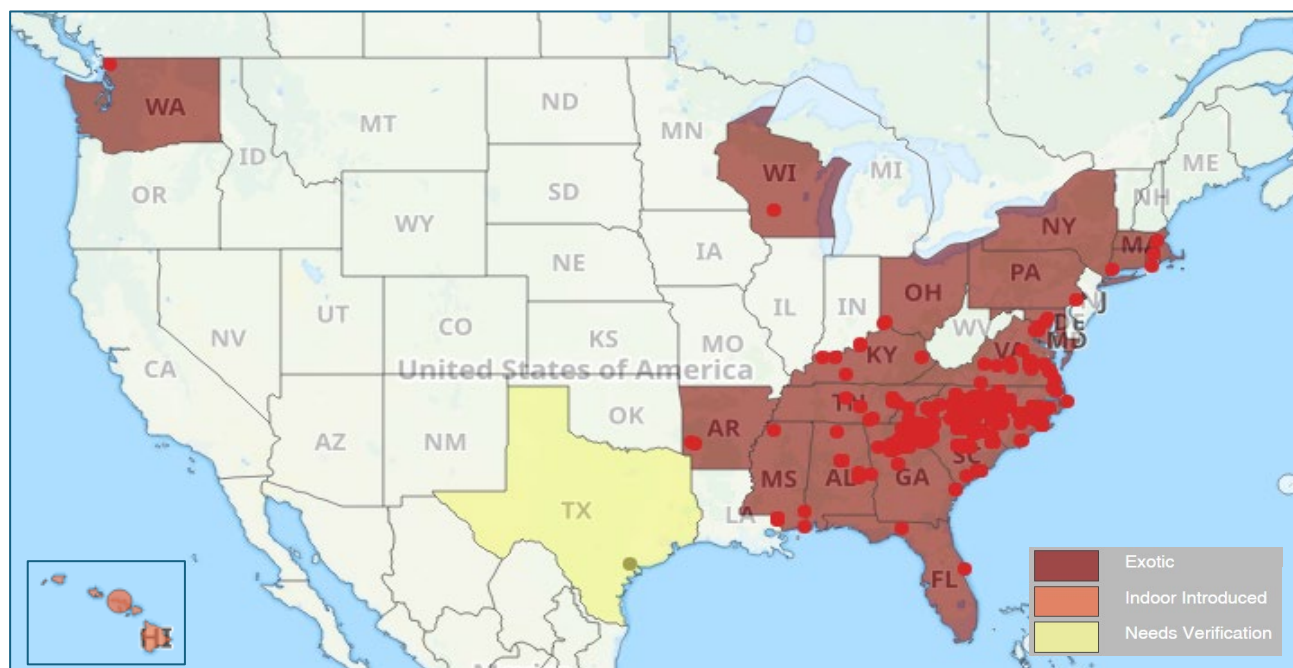


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Photo by Harum Koh, CC BY-SA 2.0
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Brachyponera chinensis (formerly *Pachycondyla chinensis*), more commonly known as the **Asian needle ant**, is actually nothing new here. It was originally introduced to the United States from east Asia nearly a century ago, and first detected in Georgia in the early 1930s. It has since spread throughout most Atlantic states, from New England to Florida, and westward to the Mississippi River, with isolated populations documented in Arkansas, Hawaii, Wisconsin and Washington state. Currently at least 20 U.S. states have reported populations of this ant.



Current distribution of Asian needle ants (source: antmap.org)

Description & Biology

Adult workers of Asian needle ant range from 4 to 5 mm in length ($1/8 - 3/16$ ") and are typically dark brown to black in color, shiny, with a slender body, and a single prominent node on the petiole (the distinct constriction between the thorax and abdomen).

Their common name refers to a painful defensive sting, delivered by a sharp, needle-like stinger, which can cause localized swelling and, in some cases, severe allergic reactions. Anaphylaxis has been reported to occur in about 2% of those stung.

Unlike imported fire ants, Asian needle ants are not generally considered aggressive, and will tend to flee and hide if disturbed. However, if provoked, they may defend themselves, so caution is warranted for individuals who may be sensitive to insect stings.

The winged reproductive castes (swarmers) differ in appearance. Winged females are approximately 5.6 mm (0.22") in length, with black bodies and brown mouthparts and legs. Winged males are smaller, around 3.0 mm (0.12"), and light brown in color.



Asian needle ant worker. Photo by Eli Sarnat, Antkey, USDA APHIS PPQ (source: bugwood.org)



Male swarmer. Photo by Zachary Dankowicz (CC BY-NC) inaturalist.com



Female swarmer. Photo by Solomon V. Hendrix (CC BY-NC) inaturalist.com

Habitat & Ecology

Asian needle ants nest successfully in both undisturbed hardwood forests and developed urban/suburban areas. They have spread mainly through human-aided transport, such as shipments of soil, plants, and wood products. They prefer damp, shaded environments such as leaf litter and soil beneath stones, logs, stumps, and debris. They may be found under mulch beds or landscaping features such as railroad ties, ornamental stones, statues, concrete pavers, and other elements common in urban settings. Observed colony sizes range from a small single nest site with fewer than 50 individuals to multiple, closely arranged nest sites with more than 5,000 individuals. Multiple cooperating queens per colony are not unusual.

As an introduced species, *B. chinensis* has left their natural enemies behind, allowing them to easily compete with and displace native ant species in new territories, disrupting mutualisms like seed dispersal mechanisms. Swarming can occur in spring (March-May), giving them a competitive advantage over other species to establish new colonies. Alates may be observed entering homes at this time. Foraging activity reaches its peak in July and August.

Control & Management

Little practical action can be taken to eradicate these ants if established in forest ecosystems without also significantly impacting native ant species. In urban environments, however, habitat modification to eliminate suitable nesting sites can be very effective at discouraging their spread. Remove rotting logs, dense leaf litter, stacked firewood, landscape debris, mulch piles, and groundcovers like ivy. Reduce moisture by improving drainage, eliminate standing water, and dry up damp areas to make your property less appealing to swarms seeking nesting sites.

Chemical controls for Asian needle ants are similar to those recommended for other pest ant species. These include ant baits containing hydramethylnon, fipronil, or indoxacarb. Place baits along foraging trails and near known nests. Liquid insecticides around home foundations and landscape edges can help reduce outdoor foraging workers. Spot-treat suspected nesting sites (e.g., under stones, in mulch) with insecticidal dusts or granular insecticides for better colony penetration. These methods are not specific to *B. chinensis*, and can significantly affect native ant populations as well. If infestations persist or involve interior spaces, professionals can deploy residual insecticides and ongoing monitoring to suppress colonies. Combine habitat modification with chemical control for sustained results, and continue to monitor. Occasionally place food baits like peanut butter or tuna near suspected foraging routes and check frequently to detect foraging activity by elusive ants. Preserve specimens in alcohol for examination by local cooperative extension agents or pest control professionals to ensure correct species identification.