

SWARMING INSECTS - TERMITES OR ANTS?

During our spring season is the time that homeowners may notice swarming insects in and around their property. In our area you can have BOTH ants and termites beginning to swarm, so you should first make the proper identification between ants and termites before developing an attack plan. It is more likely that the swarm will be made up of ants; however, it could be termites. If so, that particular swarm needs to be treated sooner rather than later in order to prevent severe damage to building structures. So, before applying any insecticide or pesticide, you should first make a positive identification of the type of swarming insects. This prevents you from applying the wrong insecticide or pesticide application.

So, a word about their anatomies. The ant and the termite both have narrow bodies, but the ant's body has a narrow waist and the termite has a thick waist. Both have antennae, but the ant's antennae is elbowed and the termite's antennae is straight. Also, ants will have longer legs than the termite. When wings are present, the wings of the termite are the same length but, on the ant, the front wings are longer than the back wings.

As for types - there are two types of termites - Subterranean and Drywood. Each type needs a different treatment. Once you know which insect you have and, if it IS a termite problem, in almost all cases a professional exterminator is recommended in order to get the best termite treatment. However, if your problem comes from swarming ants, you can likely handle the problem. Try to find where they are entering the house and use caulking to seal up their entry point(s). Then, apply ant baits or insecticides made for home use. Many of these ant baits can also be used in and around garden beds.

Need more help? You can put some of the swarming insects into a clean plastic bag and bring them into our office to get identification. Or, you may take pictures of the insects and e-mail them to our office at: mq@tulsamastergardeners.org

More information is available at the Tulsa Master Gardeners office located on 15th street, by phone (918)746-3701, or by browsing the TMG website tulsamastergardeners.org. Also, there is additional information available in the OSU Fact Sheet EPP-7312 (Household Pest Control).