

Termites

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Termites are a fact of life for most of us in the Florida Keys. It is rare to find a wooden home that does not have some termite damage. In the Keys, the most prevalent damaging termite species are drywood, dampwood, and subterranean.

Usually in May, June, and July, winged kings and queens leave the colony to reestablish themselves in another location. They typically swarm during the day or night, depending on the species. Ants are also swarming at this time, but they are easy to distinguish by looking at three distinct characteristics: (1) the antennae, (2) the “waist,” and (3) the wings. Ant antennae are bent in the middle, or “elbowed,” while the termite antennae are like a strand of beads, with no bend in the middle. The ant also has a very tight constriction between the thorax and the abdomen, forming a very small “waist.” The termite has no constriction and is “thick-waisted.” The ant wings are of different sizes, with larger forewings and smaller hind wings, while the termite wings are all of equal size.

After the termites have finished swarming (mating flight), they discard their wings. If the swarm happens inside your house, then you may see a large number of wings on window sills and near doors. This is an indication of probable infestation. The termite pairs look for a suitable living location: the drywood termites look for dry sound wood; dampwood termites look for saturated or decayed wood; and the subterranean termites look for suitable soils.

Another sign of termite infestation are the pellets (frass) of partially digested wood. Drywood frass has a distinctive six-sided dry pellet, while the dampwoods create an elongated moist pellet, and the Asian subterranean produce a sticky frass that is incorporated into their mud tubes and galleries. All drywood termite pellets should be removed after a treatment to insure that colony activity has ceased. A retreatment is warranted if new pellets are observed. Pellets may continue to trickle from wood after successful control if the wood member is periodically subjected to vibrations or jarring such as a door or door frame.

If you notice signs of infestation (broken wings, frass, or mud tubes), the home should be inspected to determine what type of termite is present, how many colonies exist, and their location within the structure or yard.

It is important to have your termite species correctly identified and treated in a timely fashion. Dampwood termites can be controlled by removing the infested wood, doing spot treatments and eliminating the moisture problem. Drywood termite control measures include wood replacement, spot treatment, and house fumigation. The subterranean can be controlled by structural modifications, establishing physical and chemical barriers, and setting up bait stations.

Frequently, the skills of a pest management professional are required. These professionals have the equipment and pesticide products needed for controlling the different termite types. Most companies offer only one or a few of the termite control methods, therefore, it is prudent to contact several companies for inspections and treatment recommendations before choosing the company and specific treatment which best fit your needs. For more information about “Choosing a Licensed Wood-Destroying

Organism Inspector,” log onto the following Web address, <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/IN629>, or look at the FDACS Web site www.doacs.state.fl.us, or call **1 800 HELP FLA (435-7352)**. Companies that provide termite control services are licensed and inspected by that department. Consumers can call the toll free number to determine whether a company is properly licensed.

Here are some steps that consumers can take to protect their homes from termites:

- Remove woodpiles and other cellulose sources from under and next to their homes.
- Have an annual inspection of their homes by a licensed professional pest control company.
- Renew their termite protection contract annually.
- Direct water sources, such as air conditioner drip lines and roof down spouts, away from the structure foundation.
- When purchasing homes, carefully check the termite protection history of the home.
- When building a new home, be sure that approved preconstruction practices are followed.

For additional information about termites and their control visit the University of Florida’s EDIS Web site, <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>, and search for “termite.”

Selected References:

“Subterranean Termites” P.G. Koehler and C.L. Tucker <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/IG097>

“Drywood and Dampwood Termites” P.G. Koehler and F.M. Oi
<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/IG098>

“Be Kind to Termites? NOT!” Dan Culbert
<http://okeechobee.ifas.ufl.edu/News%20columns/Termite%20Month.htm>