

ANTS AND TERMITES



Typical sterile female worker ant.



Almonds on the ground eaten by ants



Ant tending scale insects in citrus

Description

Ants protect and care for honeydew-producing insects such as aphids, soft scales, whiteflies, and mealybugs, increasing damage from these pests. Ants also perform many useful functions in the environment, such as feeding on other pests (e.g., fleas, caterpillars, termites), dead insects, and decomposing tissue from dead animals. Ant nests are usually in the soil and it is the sterile female worker ants that tend insect pests. There is one egg-laying queen per nest. In flood-irrigated orchards of almonds, apricots and citrus with heavy soils, ant nests tend to be concentrated on the ridges.

Ants can be a pest in nut orchards where fallen ripe nuts are allowed to remain on the ground for a time before being harvested.

Termites are sometimes found in vineyards. They can be distinguished from ants because they don't have a 'waist'. They eat the heart wood entering at soil level through large pruning cuts or other damage. In bad cases, the vine collapses.

Monitoring

Ants climbing a tree are usually a sign of other sap-sucking pests. Monitor in late winter and record presence.

Control

Sowing an intercrop of vetch (*Vicia sativa*) provides ants with a good source of nectar and attracts them away from trees and vines.

Sticky bands around tree trunks can prevent ants from climbing.

Baits are the preferred chemical method for ant control using slow-acting insecticides that worker ants collect and feed to other ants, including the queen. Treat when ants are active in early spring following winter rains and again in late August. Liquid baits use a pesticide mixed with sugar water. Replace liquid frequently as evaporation makes the bait too strong. Imidacloprid is very effective in baits.

Termites are controlled by avoiding large pruning cuts and mechanical damage to vines at soil level. Fipronil or chlorpyrifos can be used as a drench applied to the base of trees and vines to control ants and termites.