Pavement Ant – An Increasingly Annoying Nuisance Pest

By: Art Antonelli and Jenny Glass, WSU Puyallup REC

The pavement ant, *Tetramorium caespitum*, is becoming more common as a nuisance ant pest in the Pacific Northwest. This species was introduced from Europe over 200 years ago and is now widespread throughout the United States. This small ant is monomorphic (workers all about the same size) measuring about 2.5–3 mm in length. Body colors range from light brown to darker browns and blacks while the appendages are lighter in color. This ant species can be identified by its two segmented pedicel ("waist") and the epinotum (Fig. 1.) with a pair of spines that point somewhat backward. The ant's antenna is 12 segmented with three of the segments forming a club. These ants have a stinger but are rarely aggressive against humans.

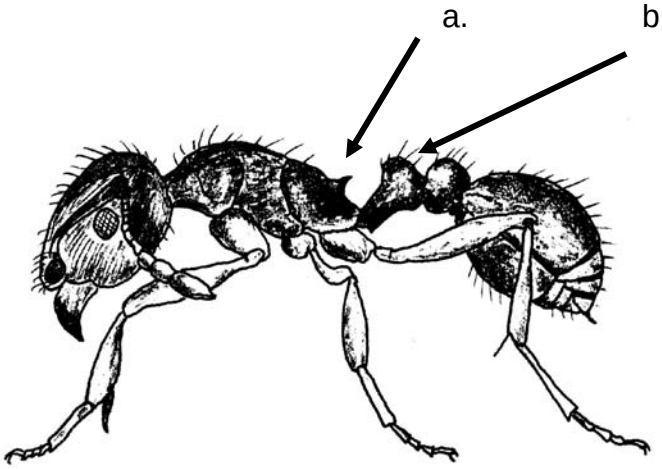

Fig.1. Lateral view of pavement ant worker
(a. epinotal spine; b. pedicel)

Pavement ant colonies typically contain thousands of worker ants and several reproductive queens. Nests can be found in exposed soil under stones or pavement, in rotting wood, and sometimes in homes. The reproductive swarms (flying males and new queens) can be observed throughout the year occurring most commonly in June and July.

Pavement ants are quite omnivorous and feed on both live and dead insects, seeds, sap of many plants, and the honeydew of sucking plant pests such as aphids. Like many ants, they will tend and protect aphids. They also feed on various household foods such as meats, grease, nuts, chips, cheese, bread and honey. They do, however, show a preference for meats and grease. They also feed on the pollen collected by ground nesting bees. They are particularly harmful to pollinating ground nesting bees such as alkali bees and will actively assassinate adult bees to get to the bee's larvae and pollen. In their attempt to procure plant sap, pavement ants can girdle and kill such plants as tomatoes, cabbage, carrots, etc.

Pavement ants are most problematic to people when they are found nesting in homes. Typical sites for nests include wall voids, attic insulation, and under structures such as water heaters and toilets. Outdoors, they may be considered a nuisance or a minor pest when they damage vegetables in the garden. Additionally, the pavement ant is a known intermediate host of two species of poultry tapeworms.

Management

To prevent entry into homes, use barrier treatments of a registered* material applied around the foundation making sure that some of the product gets up under the siding. If the pavement ant nest is found, directly treating the nest is effective. Baiting may also work. Follow label directions carefully if insecticides are used.

*Ant product registrations change over time. Insect Diagnostic Laboratories or Extension personnel usually have access to current labels for effective ant treatments.

References

Smith, M.R. 1965. House-Infesting Ants of the Eastern United States; Their Recognition, Biology, and Economic Importance. USDA Tech Bull. No. 1326

Smith, E.H. and R.C. Whitman. 1992. NPMA Field Guide to Structural Pests. NPMA Press.

Akre, R.D. and A.L. Antonelli. 1992. Identification and Habits of Key Ant Pests of Washington (Workers and Winged Reproductives) WSU CES. EB 0671.