

ABC PEST CONTROL

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Termites Termites



Preventing termites does not only involve the pest control inspections but also learning about their behaviour and recognising the early signs. Termites are also referred to as white ants although they are not ants at all. They are in fact a social relative of the cockroach. Termites belong to the cockroach order (Blattodea) and ants share their insect order with bees and wasps (the Hymenoptera).

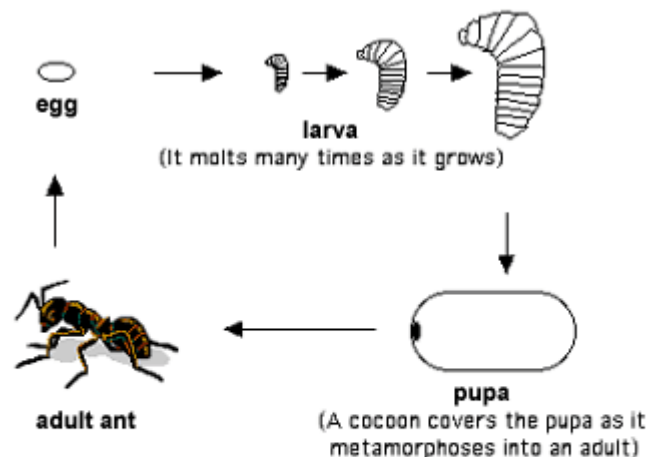
Termites live in highly structured colonies, in formed nests deep in the ground or inside logs.

Life cycle of a termite colony is different to those of the ant. See the diagram (right)

The life cycle of the ant consists of four stages: egg, larva, pupa, and adult.

Fertilized eggs produce female ants (queens, workers, or soldiers); unfertilized eggs produce male ants.

The termite life cycle (refer to diagram below) is based on a caste system, where there are workers or their equal, soldiers, and reproductive adults called queens and kings.



ANT LIFE CYCLE

Each colony consists of the following members of which each one has a specific job:

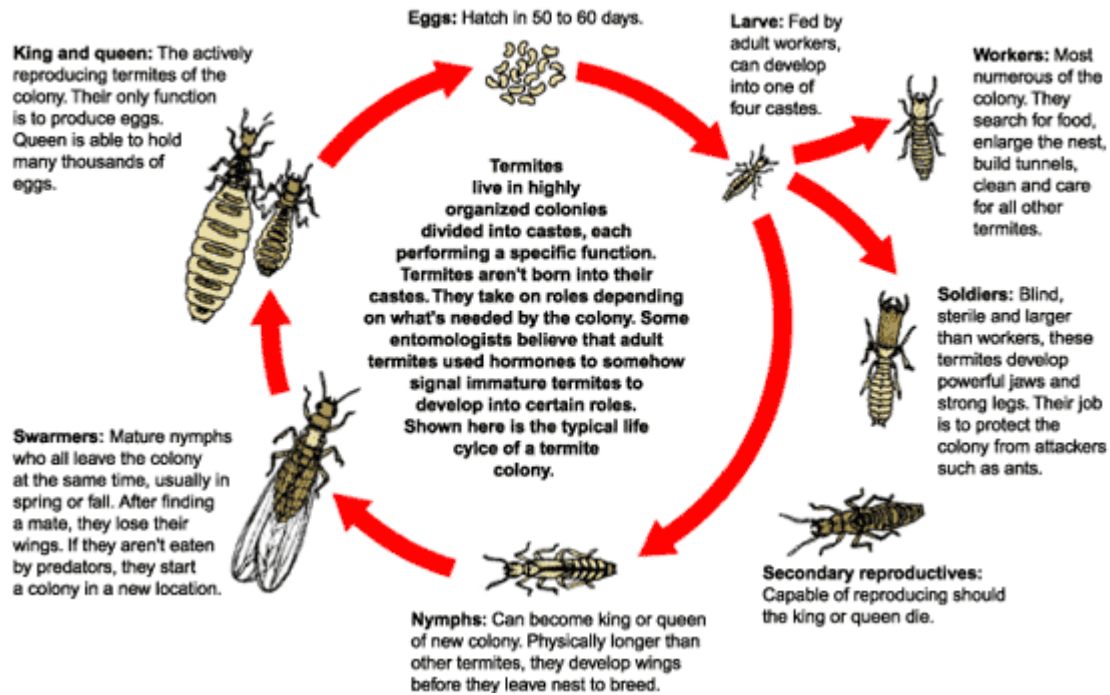
- king and queen
- nymphs, larvae
- winged reproductive (young queen and king aka *alates*)
- workers
- soldiers



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Life Cycle of a Termite Colony



A colony always consists of a king and queen. These are regarded as the parents as they have fully developed sex organs. Once the queen begins to lay eggs, her body size increases and may reach up to 11 cm in length. The queen can produce 2,000 eggs per day. The king remains with the queen for the rest of her life and continues to fertilise the eggs. The king is 1 - 2 cm long. Both parents can live for 25 years depending on the location of the nest, conditions and availability of food. As the queen gets older, her reproductive ability declines and then the colony chooses a young queen and king or alates.

The winged reproductives are also known as swarmer or alates. About a third of the termite population leave the well established colony in search of a new location. These cannot fly very well and most often are swept by the wind. The alates are packed with nutritious food to begin a new colony. Very few survive after the flight as most get eaten, usually by birds, ants and lizards. When the swarmer land successfully on the ground, they search for a mate. These termites shed their wings after mating, which makes them the new king and queen ready to set up a new colony.

The workers consist of the largest number of individuals in the colony. These termites are blind and maintain the colony through: provision of food, grooming the queen, repair of damaged tunnel walls and creation of new tunnels.

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The soldiers defend the colony against enemies. One soldier may guard an entry but more soldiers will be standing behind. The true ants are their deadliest enemies. They are slightly bigger than the workers. They are blind, sterile and have no wings. The soldier termites have large jaws and are dependant on the workers. Both workers and soldiers live for an average of a year.

Termites are selective in their choice of food. They feed on plant fibres (cellulose), sugars and starches found in wood. Some wood may not be to their liking due to its taste, presence of chemicals and its density. The thicker the wood, the longer it will take for the termites to chew through it.

The worker termites have the ability to digest the cellulose in the infested wood. This is due to the presence of single celled protozoa in their intestines. The protozoa produce an enzyme that converts the plant fibres into soluble glucose. These protozoa are passed on to other members in the colony through the consumption of their faeces, grooming and consumption of the dead or injured members of the colony.

The nests are sealed from air to maintain humidity in the range of 25-35 degrees. Most termites do not like the light and therefore live and work in the dark. Once they are exposed they follow their scent back home. The central nest may extend up to 100 m in radius as the termites continue to build tunnels in search of food.

Termites work together and build amazing structures and hollow trees. They are vital to the ecology but are also destructive to your home.

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