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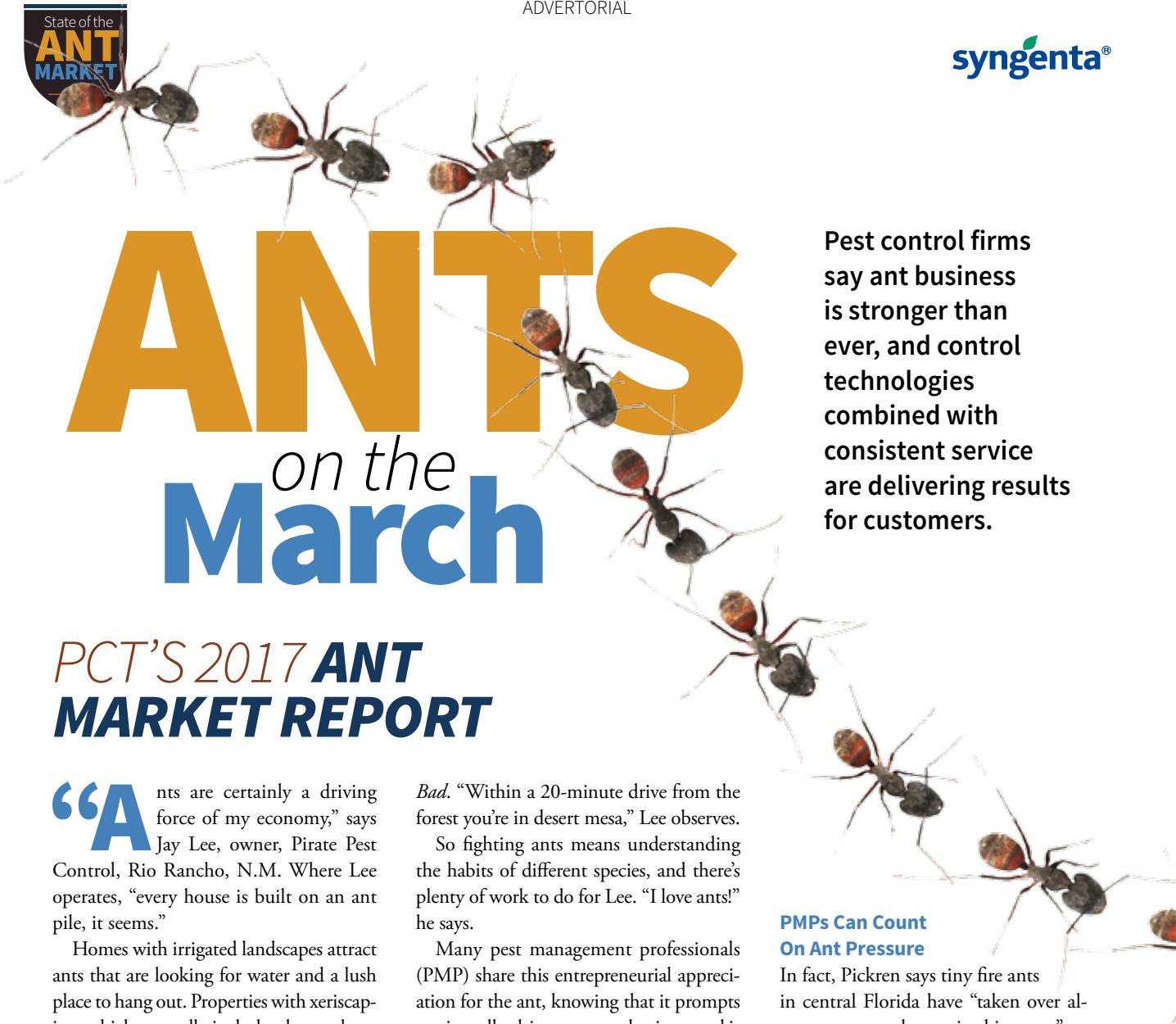
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State of the
ANT
MARKET



» **INSIDE:**

- Exclusive Market Research
- Managing Multi-Colony Species
- Tips for Preventing Callbacks
- Most Popular Treatment Techniques
- Ants: A Virtually Universal Service



ANTS

on the March

PCT'S 2017 **ANT** **MARKET REPORT**

“Ants are certainly a driving force of my economy,” says Jay Lee, owner, Pirate Pest Control, Rio Rancho, N.M. Where Lee operates, “every house is built on an ant pile, it seems.”

Homes with irrigated landscapes attract ants that are looking for water and a lush place to hang out. Properties with xeriscaping, which generally includes desert plants and rocks, provide cozy homes for ants to nest. Lee uses a shovel to lift up rocks and find ants; and he digs shallow trenches next to the structure to apply product alongside stucco structures, which are common in his area.

There are different ants in every neighborhood of his region. Some places are over-ridden with pavement ants that love slab structures. Other neighborhoods are rife with fire ants. “You get diverse environments here because we have the Rio Grande running through the city, so there’s the forested bosky with carpenter ants and native species,” Lee says.

Other places in the community look exactly like the opening scene of *Breaking*

Bad. “Within a 20-minute drive from the forest you’re in desert mesa,” Lee observes.

So fighting ants means understanding the habits of different species, and there’s plenty of work to do for Lee. “I love ants!” he says.

Many pest management professionals (PMP) share this entrepreneurial appreciation for the ant, knowing that it prompts service calls, drives contract business and is a consistent pest that is showing no signs of fading away. Ninety-three percent of pest control companies surveyed in PCT’s 2017 Ant Market Report offer ant control services.

“Ants are the No. 1 pest in terms of causing problems because there are so many different kinds and they exploit diverse resources in and around a structure for shelter or food — they’re constantly foraging,” says Stoy Hedges, a well-known pest control industry consultant.

“I probably wouldn’t get half of the customers I have if it weren’t for ants — and we do have every ant you can imagine here,” says Bob Pickren, owner, Buggy’s Exterminating Co., Deland, Fla. “Ants never stop.”

Pest control firms say ant business is stronger than ever, and control technologies combined with consistent service are delivering results for customers.

PMPs Can Count On Ant Pressure

In fact, Pickren says tiny fire ants in central Florida have “taken over almost every sandy area in this town.”

The red imported fire ant, indeed, is a problem in the Sunshine State, says Phil Koehler, entomologist, University of Florida, Gainesville, Fla. The ant was first introduced to the United States in 1932, and it has spread throughout the southern states, now infesting more than 300 million acres, he says.

“What’s tough about controlling the red fire ant is the sheer number and the fact that we have warm weather all the time, so they re-infest,” Koehler says.

Fire ants can gain access to structures in a variety of ways including weep holes. “Inside buildings, fire ants nest in wall voids, bath traps and under carpets,” according to the *PCT Field Guide for the*

Management of Structure-Infesting Ants. “Colonies have been observed in crawlspaces, under slabs, in rain gutters clogged with debris, and in the gravel on flat roofs of commercial buildings. Fire ants can be quite adaptable in their nesting habits.”

In less diverse environments, such as new housing developments, fire ants often thrive. Fire ants’ love of disturbed areas is actually a barometer for determining whether a natural area has been impacted by development, Koehler says. It’s interesting to observe how ants thrive in urban areas that have been disrupted as a result of new development, Koehler added.

“Ants are a part of nature, and they are one of the most prevalent life forms we have in natural areas,” Koehler said. In other words, they aren’t going anywhere, and many PMPs would agree that’s a good thing for the structural pest control industry.

Ants are the first problem customers want to target in the White Plains, Md., region where Arrow American Pest & Termite Control is located, say owners Bonnie

Morris and Norm Stafford. “We see green when we hear ants,” Morris quips. And Stafford agrees, “Ants keep the phones ringing.”

While Arrow has not necessarily seen growth in the ant business, it’s a staple — and the service generates loyal clients. First-time ant calls often turn into contract customers when the Arrow team explains that consistent con-

trol is what keeps ants away. “We do a lot of preventive care and customers are very happy with that because they don’t see ants after they were used to seeing them all the time,” Morris says.

Meanwhile, in Fargo, N.D., where the outdoor season for pesky things is shorter than other parts of the country and there is less population, ants are not a significant problem, says Alec Winmill, SafeYard Mosquito Control. “We are close to the Minnesota lakes country where people have weekend houses, and ants get in more there,” he says.

Winmill estimates that about 20 percent of customers who call mention ants, but usually they bring up ants *after* they ask about controlling mosquitoes.

Seasonality & Weather

Depending on the region of the country, ants can be a year-round battle or an issue customers call about mainly in spring. From the Ant Market Report, 46 percent say spring is the busiest time of year for ant services, followed by 36 percent in summer and 4 percent in fall. Ant service frequency drops off in winter, with a scant 1 percent of respondents noting this was a busy time for ant control in their region.

Of course, along the Gulf Coast and in areas like Florida, Texas, Arizona and California, ant control is a year-round service demand.

Pickren says ants are constant companions in Florida, but activity ramps

up during dry weather. “They’re looking for water, going inside,” he relates.

On the other hand, an unusually rainy spring in San Antonio and Austin, Texas, has sparked more ant activity this year, says Chris Baumbach, owner, Pinnacle Pest Defense, New Braunfels, Texas. Usually, the ant cycle is at its peak in his region from February through May. “We’ve had a wetter year than the past five years put together, and this spring we had huge problems with carpenter ants,” he reports.

The rain also instigates fire ant issues, Baumbach notes, adding that these ants are “like the devil” and are usually rampant through fall.

In Copan, Okla., Quinton Mackey says 85 to 90 percent of calls in April and May are ant-related. Of his regular customers, about 40 percent are on an ant control regimen. “It seems like I’m getting more calls this year,” he says, not sure whether that’s because word is getting around about his success rate (rarely any callbacks) or if ant pressure is worse.

“I don’t think ants are going anywhere,” Mackey adds. “I think the business is getting bigger.”

Most Problematic Species

Which pests cause the most problems for PMPs? Odorous house ants are notorious, with 56 percent of survey respondents calling them the most problematic ant species. And, while tawny crazy ants are a tough control issue for only 6 percent of respondents, this species is also spreading and is expected to become more of an issue (see charts on page 4).

Baumbach says the tawny crazy ant is *not* in the Austin/San Antonio area yet, but he talked with a colleague in Houston who said this species is a real issue. “They are coming,” he says, relating that he has received two customer calls. “We can’t avoid them. That ant came in from mulch from Houston.”

What makes tawny crazy ants challenging to control is the volume of ants that infest a property and structure, Koehler says. These ants have multiple queens. “I



Nylanderia fulva — tawny crazy ant

Managing Multi-Colony Species

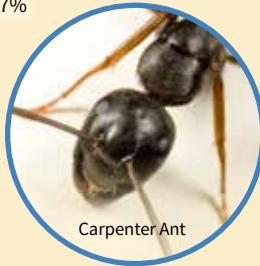
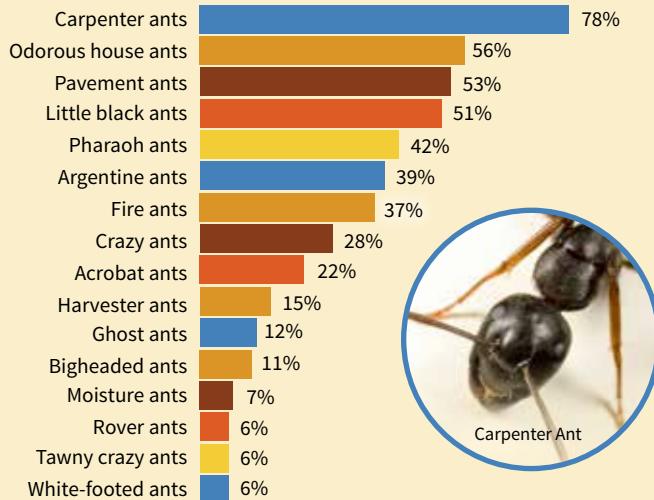
There’s no sure-fire method for managing tough species like Argentine ants or tawny crazy ants with multiple colonies on a property. Careful identification, observation of ant behavior (watching the trail), and a layered control strategy is your best bet.

“With ants that have sub-colonies on a property, a bait may take out one colony, but then ants repopulate other satellite colonies,” explains industry consultant Stoy Hedges.

“It takes going out on the property, turning over rocks, getting into leaf litter and looking for colonies so you can drench them,” he continues. “It also involves using baits and perimeter treatments to get the ones you overlooked or missed.”

Multiple Species Causing Problems For PMPs...

What ant species tend to be problematic in your market area?



Source: Readex Research; Number of respondents: 235

But These Are The Most Problematic

What ant species is the most difficult to control in your market area?

22%
ODOROUS HOUSE ANTS



12%

Pharaoh ants

12%

Carpenter ants

11%

Argentine ants

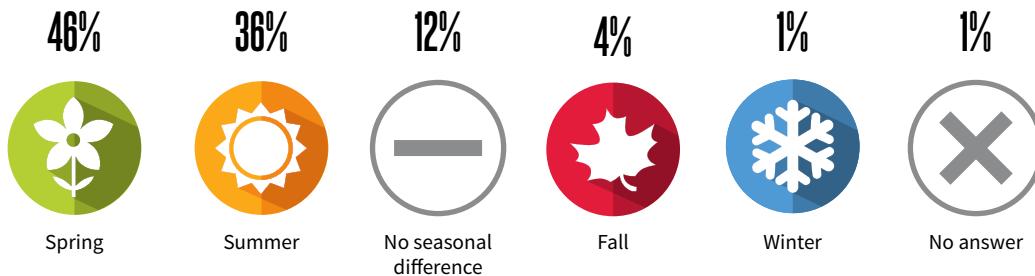
10%

Fire ants

Source: Readex Research; Number of respondents: 235

Spring/Summer Prime Time For Ant Services

For your location, what season tends to be the busiest for providing ant control services?



Source: Readex Research; Number of respondents: 235

followed one trail for about a mile, and it ran from tree to tree,” he says.

In fact, the tawny crazy ant can outcompete fire ants in certain areas, according to Koehler.

Odorous house ants are also a bugger to control, “and that’s probably the ant that gives us the most issues,” says Chuck Simko, owner of New Mexico Pest Control in Santa Fe. “You treat an area and they relocate,” he says, relating that homes

built on slabs create ideal conditions for ants, in general. “Ants come up around the pipes, and many of the houses here are radiant heated, which gives you a problem year-round because the ground is always heated up.”

For this reason, Simko says he tries not to sell one-time services for ant control, especially when odorous house ants or carpenter ants are involved (another issue in his region). Persistence is the key with

controlling ants of any kind, and particularly those like odorous house ants with a propensity to “relocate,” and the tawny crazy because of its ability to proliferate (see above charts).

“We tell customers upfront that we’ll need to come back because the ants will relocate,” Simko says. “You can’t eliminate a problem with a one-time service, so many people end up going on a contract with us.” 🐜



A Constant for Business

Ants aren't going anywhere, and most pest control operators say ant control is an important part of their revenue stream.

Ants are a business mainstay for most pest management professionals (PMPs), and the business is increasing for a majority of companies that PCT surveyed in its 2017 Ant Market Report. Ant control services are increasing for 49 percent of respondents, with 46 percent reporting the same level of ant business, and just 4 percent of owners noting a decrease in demand (see chart on page 6).

“Oh, yeah — ants keep us in business,” says Bonnie Morris, partner in Arrow American Pest & Termite Control, White Plains, Md. She estimates that more than half of clients’ initial calls for service are because of ants.

“Ant service is a big part of what our residential calls involve,” Morris relates. Commercial accounts call for various reasons, but they also need support to keep ants away. “Ants are often the first thing on their target list.”

Ant control service can be quite profitable, according to Quinton Mackey, owner, Advanced Pest Solutions, Copan, Okla. “I probably have 75 percent income vs. expense in ant services,” he says, relating that he generally completes an ant control job in about 40 minutes to one hour, sometimes longer depending on the severity of the infestation and if it’s a first-time visit.

Ant revenue is a boon for business, and 62 percent of respondents expect their



business from ant control services to increase in 2017. (Only 1 percent said they anticipate a decrease in revenue generated by ant control services.)

Chuck Simko certainly notices a boost in ant pressure and the positive impact on his business. “I’ve been doing this for 48 years, and I’ve seen cycles over the years,” he says. The last year and a half has been a heavy ant cycle in Santa Fe, N.M., where he runs his business, New Mexico Pest Control.

“Ants are on the increase, and a good portion of our business deals with ant control,” Simko adds.

Service Calls On The Rise

Ant control is becoming an even more important part of pest control businesses’ revenue streams. More than half of respondents (55 percent) say ant services are more significant today than the past.

For PMPs in some areas of the country,

the range of ants infesting properties is keeping the phones ringing. For instance, Florida has more than 200 different ant species, says Phil Koehler, entomologist, University of Florida. A good dozen of those solicit regular calls.

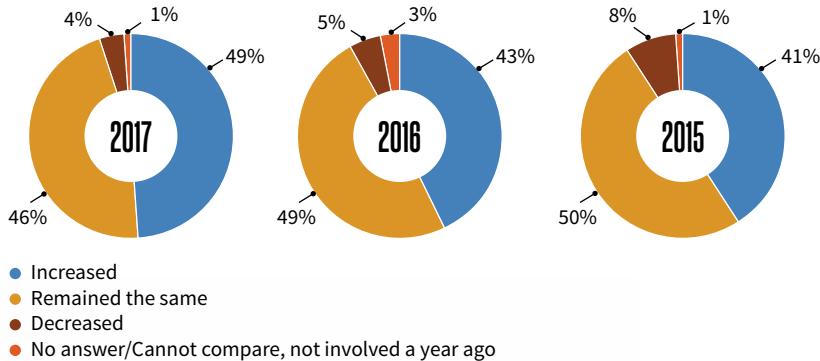
For other PMPs, the repeat business from ant control accounts for the service’s importance in the overall revenue stream.

And the reality is, even in winter, ants don’t completely go away. Calls still come in during January and February in the Northeast to request ant control, Morris says. “It’s pretty consistent, though we do get more ant calls during spring,” Morris says.

In regions where ant pressure is particularly high, regular service is a must. This translates to recurring revenue for pest control operators. Koehler says of the battle to control ants in Florida, “Customers need service as much as they are willing to pay for.” 🐜

Three-Year Trend Very Positive

Over the past year, do you feel the incidence of ant infestations has increased, decreased, or remained the same in your market area?

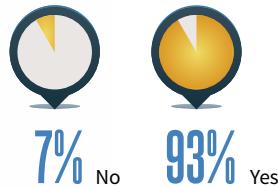


Source: Readex Research; Number of respondents: 2017: 235; 2016: 324; 2015: 177



Ant Control: A Virtually Universal Service

Does your company location offer ant control services?

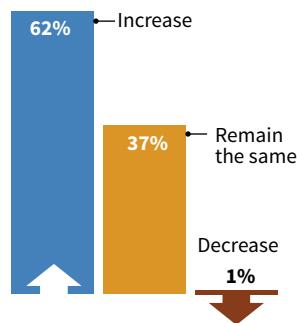


Source: Readex Research
Number of respondents: 252

PMPs Anticipate Strong Growth In 2017 Season

Compared to 2016, do you anticipate the percentage of your location's revenue generated from its ant control service to increase, decrease, or remain the same in 2017?

Source: Readex Research; Number of respondents: 235



ABOUT THIS SURVEY The survey sample was randomly selected from PCT's e-mail list of PMP owners/operators, executives, partners, and presidents. The survey was conducted by Readex Research, a third-party research firm, from April 13 to April 25, 2017, with 252 total responses — a 7.4 percent response rate. Seventeen respondents were eliminated because they indicated they did not offer ant control services.

Curbing Callbacks

More pest control firms are adopting baiting technology to control ants and emphasizing regular maintenance.

A homeowner in Oklahoma calls Quinton Mackey the ant whisperer. "Come and do your magic here again," she'll tell him when she calls to renew annual service. She had ants for 50 years and finally called Mackey when she heard around town that his service was working.

Mackey is owner of Advanced Pest Solutions in Copan, Okla., and he takes an investigative approach to identifying ants and educating clients about their behaviors.

Mackey applies bait on an infested property and shows homeowners how workers trail to the food. "They can see ants lined up on the bait, carrying it away — we watch them, follow them," Mackey relates. "We see where they carry the bait to. It could be outside to a tree, or to a spot inside the house. It's like solving a mystery."

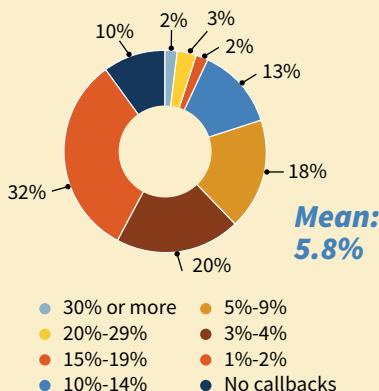
When clients see ants take to the bait and witness how Mackey strategically works to control various species, they're sold. "I take care of them," he says of the ants, and his customers.

He rarely gets a callback. "I probably had to do 10 extra ant services in the last four years," he says.

Mackey attributes this to the control methods he uses, and his diligence placing control products in target areas. He places baits outside the home's perimeter and avoids the home's interior, if possible.

Callbacks A Concern For Some PMPs, Not A Problem For Others

What is your location's typical callback rate for its ant control jobs?



Source: Readex Research
Number of respondents: 235

“I find the colonies that are coming into the house, and I bait and use gels on the foundation going into the house,” he says.

A layered control approach works for many pest management professionals (PMPs), who say that controlling ants is not a one-time deal, nor is there a one-size-fits-all solution.

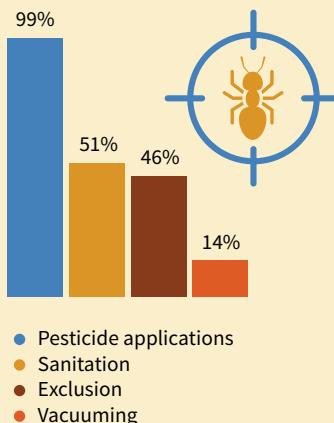
Some species want a sweet bait (ghost ants), and others may contact sprayed areas (rover ants), says Phil Koehler, entomologist, University of Florida. Ants with multiple queens and systems of colonies (tawny crazy ant, Argentine ant) are a challenge because of their sheer numbers.

“For instance, if a PCO treats a house to knock down the ant populations, you can have piles of dead [tawny crazy] ants that are, like, 6 inches deep and they have to use leaf blowers to remove ants from the insecticide residual so they can kill more ants,” Koehler says. “You can be dealing with billions of ants in an area.”

So, what can PMPs do to control ants in general, and these especially tricky species in particular? Consistent service can prevent callbacks, and a multi-faceted approach using baits and residual sprays when necessary can be effective.

Pesticides Key To Ant Control Efforts

What types of control measures does your location use to manage ants in homes and/or businesses?



Source: Readex Research; Number of respondents: 235

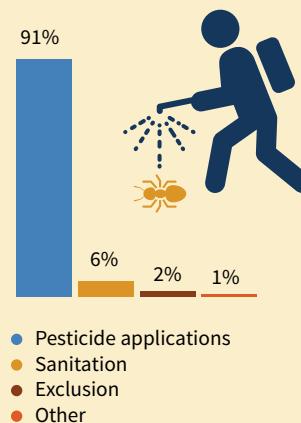
Regular Visits Prevent Callbacks

A critical part of controlling ants is the legwork a technician does to identify the species, locate colonies and target areas to achieve control on a property. Educating customers is also an important piece that can elevate the success of an ant control program, Mackey says.

“Experience is the best teacher,” says Stoy Hedges, industry consultant. “If you are a pest control company owner, you need to get out with your technicians and show them where to find ants and how to find them,” he says. “And, show technicians how to target treatments so you can get better results in the long run, especially when you are dealing with more difficult ants like Argentine ants, tawny crazy ants and odorous house ants.”

The industry is adopting baits more readily as a primary form of ant control, notes Chris Baumbach, owner, Pinnacle Pest Defense, New Braunfels, Texas. “We are using more baits and we’ve seen a shift this direction in terms of treatment,” he says. “In the old days, they didn’t have the bait choices that are available now, so we are definitely moving toward physically baiting to remedy ant problems.”

What is your location's primary control measure for managing ants in homes and/or businesses?



Source: Readex Research; Number of respondents: 235

Again, persistence is key.

Bob Pickren, owner, Bugsy’s Exterminating Inc., Deland, Fla., describes a nightmare job, a two-story house built on a hill. Tiny fire ants had infested the kitchen and basement. “Their yard was totally infested,” he says. “The home had posts holding up a stairwell to the porch, and they had come up the inner part of the stairwell, filled up that crack and infested all the plants on the porch. The house was basically engulfed.”

Pickren baited the property heavily the first visit. Then he went back two weeks later and baited again. “I kept that up at least quarterly, or sooner if I got a call,” he says. Without this diligence, the property surely would have become infested again, he says.

“If I let a property go for more than three months, the ants are right back there again attacking,” Pickren says. “You can’t let your guard down.”

With heavy baiting, Pickren says callbacks are under control. Mackey shares this sentiment: “If you are not using enough product and you are feeding a huge colony of ants...there has to be enough bait to kill them,” he says. 🐜



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