

County: Harlan

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### Time to Think about Termites

Springtime, with its warmer temperatures and more abundant rainfall, is typically when many winged termites emerge inside homes and other structures. Termites swarm from the colony to disperse, fall to the ground, find mates, and start new colonies in the soil.

From now through May, you might see swarms of winged termites, called swarmers, inside your home, signaling an infestation that can cause extensive and costly damage. Since swarmers are attracted to light, you often see them, or their shed wings, around windows, doors and light fixtures.

We also see winged ants in the springtime. By examining the insect you can learn whether it's a termite or an ant. Termites have straight antennae; ants have elbowed antennae. Also, termites have uniform waists; ants have constricted waists between body regions. Termites have two pair of wings of equal size. Ants also have two pair of wings, but the forewings are longer than the hind wings.

Other signs of a termite infestation are pencil-thin mud "tubes" on inside and outside surfaces such as foundation walls, piers, sills and floor joists. Termites make these mud tunnels to travel between underground colonies and your home. Another sign of an infestation is damaged wood hollowed out along the grain with dried bits of mud or soil lining the feeding galleries.

Termite feeding, and resulting damage, can remain undetected in exposed wood because the outer surface usually is left intact.

You can reduce the risk of a termite attack by following these suggestions:

- Store wood off of the ground.
- Keep moisture from accumulating near the foundation.
- Reduce humidity in crawl spaces.
- Store firewood, lumber or other wood debris away from the foundation.
- Don't store wood in the crawl space.
- Sparingly use decorative wood chips and mulch.
- Consider having your home treated by a professional pest control firm.

Many infestations result from direct contact between structural wood and the soil, which gives termites access to food, moisture, shelter and provides a hidden entry into your home. Make sure to have at least six inches between the ground level and wood siding, porch steps, latticework, door or window frames, posts and similar wooden elements. Contrary to popular belief, pressure-treated wood isn't immune to infestation because termites will enter through cut ends or cracks and build tunnels over the surface to susceptible wood above.

Since termites are attracted to moisture, they are more likely to enter a structure when soil next to the foundation consistently is moist. So, divert water away from the foundation with properly functioning gutters, downspouts, and splash blocks. Repair leaking faucets, water pipes and air conditioning units. Adjust the soil grade next to the foundation so that surface water drains away from the building, and adjust lawn sprinklers and irrigation systems to minimize water pooling near the foundation.

Reduce humidity in crawl spaces by providing adequate ventilation. Don't allow shrubbery and other vegetation to grow over vents; it will inhibit cross-ventilation. You can

reduce crawl space moisture by installing four to six milliliter polyethylene sheeting over about 75 percent of the soil surface.

Firewood, lumber and other wood debris stored against the foundation or in crawl spaces, attract termites and provide a food source. This practice also gives termites a hidden entry into the home and allows them to bypass any existing termiticide soil barrier.

Cellulose-containing materials including mulch and wood chips attract termites. Use these materials sparingly, especially when you have other conditions conducive to termite problems. Never allow mulch to touch wood siding, door frames or window frames. Consider using crushed stone or pea gravel instead. These materials are less attractive to termites and can reduce other pests such as millipedes, pillbugs, earwings and crickets.

The best way to prevent termite infestations is to have your home treated by a professional pest control firm.

There are two general categories of termite treatment, liquids and baits. Liquid treatments are intended to provide an effective, long-lasting chemical barrier, which termites cannot breach, around and beneath your home. Termite baits are installed in plastic stations below the ground in the yard and occasionally indoors. Foraging termites consume the bait and share it with their nest-mates, resulting in a gradual decline in termite numbers.

Termiticides are extensively tested for adverse effects. Based on current research, registered termiticides present no significant hazard to humans, pets or the environment when applied according to label directions.

For more information on termites and other pests, contact the Harlan County Cooperative Extension Service at 573-4464.

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