

Subterranean Termite



Courtesy of Jim Kalisch, UNL Entomology



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all photos by Jim Kalisch and David Keith, UNL Entomology Dept.

Biology and Nature of Termite Behavior

Subterranean termites work by developing a complex colony under ground. Three different castes are found within a colony. First alates, or swarmers break off from an existing colony that has matured. These swarmers are what are usually seen in our area during the spring. Once a suitable place to start a new colony is found by an alate, they lose their wings and burrow into the soil. Two of these alates become the king and queen of a colony starting the whole colonization process all over again, possibly on your property. Some of the larvae that are produced by the king and the queen develop into workers, while others develop into soldiers. The sole purpose of the soldier termite is to defend the colony from predators, such as ants. The workers are another story. They are the part of the caste system within the termite colony that may attack your home. Workers are responsible for feeding the entire colony. They find food by burrowing underground and foraging randomly and continuously. That is why though they may seem to be working on one side of your home exclusively, they actually could be into other areas of your home that you may not even know about yet. Worker termites are the ones that are usually seen when people discover they may have termites.

As stated above, termites forage continuously and randomly for food. Once a termite finds a good meal, they leave a scent trail telling their fellow nest mates where to dine. They continuously will come back then on a random basis to feed themselves and to gather food for the colony. Termites may feed more actively in some areas than others depending on moisture, attacks from predators, and type of wood. Once a scent trail is established for the rest of the worker termites to come and feed there, they will continue to come back to that source.

Do I Have Termites?

If you have noticed what appears to be a thin mud trail going up a wall in an unfinished basement, swarmers in the spring, damaged wood in your home, or what appears to be pinholes in drywall, you probably have termites. However, it is still a good idea to call a pest professional to do an inspection for you to be sure.

What Made Termites Choose My Property?

Excellent question; easily answered. It most likely is nothing you did to attract them. Basically, you are unlucky. As we discussed above, termites forage randomly. It is true that certain conditions make areas more susceptible to termite infestations, though. Such as areas with a high moisture content, water damaged wood, and wood to soil contact.

Because of the termite biology and behavior that we have discussed above, it is evident that the old theory that your neighbor treating for termites will drive them to your property just isn't true. Termites, because of their random foraging, would probably find your property if it is advantageous to them eventually anyway.

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