

Argentine ant

Formicidae - Linepithema humile



What does it look like?

Argentine ants are only 2–3 mm long and are a uniform honey-brown colour. Foraging ants move steadily (not slowly) in defined continuous trails that can often be seen going up trees or shrubs, especially if these are flowering. The ants can't sting but some people react to their bite. They have a slight greasy odour when crushed, as opposed to the strong formic acid smell of some ant species. Argentine ants are frequently associated with areas of human settlement but they are not entirely restricted to modified habitats. In New Zealand, Argentine ants have invaded native habitats including scrub, mangroves, coastal forest and the edges of native forest, but forest habitat appears unlikely to be utilised.

Why is it a problem?

Argentine ants are listed by the World Conservation Union as one of the world's 100 worst invasive species. The ants eat a very wide range of foods and invade native ecosystems and displace native species. Argentine Ants are widespread in Hawke's Bay. They are being moved around the region by people (e.g. in potted plants, beehives, soil etc.). They are highly aggressive and can quickly form super-colonies, impacting on native species (e.g. birds and insects). They invade buildings and can impact on our outdoor lifestyle. The main impact on horticulture is the ability of Argentine ants to 'farm' sap-sucking aphids and scale insects, leading to a higher risk of disease transmission, reduction of crop yield and/or quality, disruption of biological control agents and an increase in spray regimes. Argentine ant bites are not poisonous but can be irritating and cause allergic-type reactions in some people.

Control Methods

Prevention - Ensure soil potted plants, outdoor equipment or other mediums which could contain ants are ant-free before moving these to other areas.
Control - Xstinguish ant bait can be used to control Argentine ants, however it does not work well during the colder months as the ants diet changes to focus on carbohydrate rather than protein sources.
Other options, such as Antsand, are also available for use, however controlling Argentine ants is not as simple as controlling most other ant species and a failed attempt (besides being costly) can also cause bait aversion syndrome or just spread the infestation further. Seeking advice from pest control experts familiar with Argentine ants is advised before DIY control is attempted.

[Request more information](https://www.hbrc.govt.nz/environment/pest-control/pest-hub/pest-hub-enquiry-form)

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