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*“Your Home Turf Advantage”*

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## HOW TO GET RID OF ANTS

In a great year with the right temperatures, the right amount of rainfall and sun, and right amount of routine lawn maintenance and lawn care services regimen applied, our lawns can indeed look **FANTASTIC!** We'd all prefer a lush green lawn that's healthier than ever. When your lawn is great, you'll end up spending more time outside enjoying it, too!

For our part as homeowners, we can control most things that contribute to a beautiful looking lawn and avoiding any serious lawn issues... But unfortunately, that's not always the case.

Just like our local climate can sometimes surprise us with variable or extreme weather that's not normal for our area, so does Nature, itself, present us with some challenges seemingly out of nowhere. They're unexpected and undesired and we have to do something about them when they occur.

For example, occasional temporary lawn fungal diseases can come and go... That's fairly common and depending upon turf conditions, homeowners may encounter a bit of this every once in a while. Fortunately they don't last long if we attend to them as soon as they occur. Some correct preventative measures or adjustments to our lawn care practices and a little bit of time can usually get our lawns back to normal so we can still enjoy the rest of the season.

However, sometimes we incur some lawn issues that are beyond our direct ability to predict or control. It may be something we don't necessarily see coming and next thing you know, we have a big problem.

As a couple examples of some serious lawn issues some of you may have encountered --- There's nothing like the surprise of post snow-melt vole damage, where suddenly once the last snow banks have melted from your lawn, you're shocked to see a maze of tunnels all over your grass thanks to these notorious varmints residing there during the winter months. Or maybe it's a year of excessive rain and you're seriously challenged with a dew worm infestation across your entire lawn, or likewise... what this article is about...

### **ANTS... Taking over your lawn...**



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Ultimately, every kind of lawn problem we might ever encounter has a fix or solution for returning back to a healthy condition. It's rarely a magical/apply-this-one-time solution and all's well thereafter --- It's usually a number of practical measures, altogether, that can help our lawns recover from any problems or challenges they encounter.

Ants taking over our lawns is one of those not-so-common challenges that nobody wants to have happen in their yard. In the same way that dew worms can turn your grass into a mine field of dirt mounds, so too, can ants cause a similar kind of grief for some homeowners.

Such an industrious army of tiny wee creatures aren't normally a problem when they're elsewhere that doesn't bother us... and we can essentially just ignore them.

In fact, on the plus side, their activity is also a natural pest control and can increase the tilth or porosity of the soil under our grass, acting as tiny aerators to loosen the dirt around roots and enhance growth.

Unless any ant infestation is particularly troublesome, the best remedy may be to live with these beneficial insects. Most ants eat the larvae of lawn pests that they find amongst the roots of the grass. So that's a plus for the grass lover. That's the good part, but there is a potential bad part, too...

Most of us are willing to share our environment with them... but only up to a point, right?

As some of us have experienced, they sure can be a nuisance if they choose to build their homes (their colonies) in the midst of your lawn, right?

## **FIRSTLY, A LITTLE BACKGROUND ON ANTS**

**You need to know what you're dealing with before you can deal with them effectively...**

Black, brown, red, or large or tiny... we likely all have a bunch of different varieties in our yards and don't even realize they're our neighbours... or maybe they were here before we were...

As we all know, ants live in nests in the soil, not like contained birds' nests in the trees but like sprawled out underground ant colonies. You might be surprised to know just how large they can actually grow to be. It likely won't matter much to us if they're in some vacant field or forest but if it's a huge colony and the ants have taken up residence in your lawn, that's a whole different degree of serious concern. You may actually be surprised to know that ants are in a lot more places in our yards than you may ever have noticed.

Ants are unique insects, with each having its own mission and particular purpose. They're social insects and their highly organized colonies can quickly grow to many hundreds or thousands of occupants.

Ant nests are very complex structures. Don't be fooled, though. The ant hill is not the nest. The nests contain nursery rooms where larvae are fed and looked after, plus food storages rooms and farming rooms, too. They even create a network of tunnels just to help with air flow and ventilation.

The colony has at least one or sometimes several fertile female queen ants. They lay eggs in specific areas of the nest called brood chambers. But the majority are smaller worker ants. The workers are wingless, sterile females that are responsible for building and maintaining the nest, protecting the colony from other ants, and most importantly, feeding the colony. Workers forage for, gather and allocate food, making sure the queen's offspring will grow to fulfil their responsibilities to the colony. Worker ants are never idle. They are the "busy bodies" you normally see when you see any ants. The queen lays all the eggs. Winged males and queens are produced in large numbers. These emerge from the nest and mate when flying.

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The male ants are drones whose only function is to mate with the queen so she can lay her eggs. Drones die as soon as they've fulfilled this function and are rarely encountered outside the colony. After mating, the fertilized queen sheds her wings and either starts a new colony or goes to an already established colony, and so on with their life cycle.

On their own, ants do what ants do and it's usually not a bother nor hindrance to us humans. As long as they keep to themselves and don't start encroaching too much into our yards we usually try to live with them, so to speak. It's when they become a potential nuisance that you may want to be prepared for an all out ongoing war with any army of ants. We don't want to come across them traversing across our patio table as we're enjoying our lunch outside. Neither do we want to find them travelling up and down our gorgeous apple tree to reach the fruit, or worst yet, notice them being very active in our vegetable garden or greenhouse.

Or shall I even dare to say it... find them under the kitchen sink, starting to infest our house... God forbid!

For the purposes of this article, we'll talk about the ones that take up residence in our lawns ---

Here and there crawling across my driveway... fine. The occasional one travelling along side my patio stones or edge of my deck... fine. But if we're starting to notice them too much and see busy trails of scores to hundreds of them busy doing whatever, and in too many places within your yard, it's time to take action. They're a little too much at home at that point and if left unaddressed you're going to have a serious ant problem. It's worse yet, if they've setup up shop in your lawn and you've got numerous ant hills appearing everywhere.

The ant hills are nothing more than excavated soil and other material that the ants remove as they dig their underground tunnels and chambers in which they nest. In fact, most ant colonies stretch surprisingly deep underground, from 10 feet to some even as deep as 25 feet, believe it or not. But if their activities on your grass have gotten that far, it's time to do something about it immediately!

While most ant species aren't extremely destructive, nobody wants these pests taking over their yard or possibly infiltrating their home. They aren't generally considered dangerous, but they can obviously pose significant health and cosmetic damage to turf grass.

Ants prefer well-drained soil in relatively undisturbed low traffic areas that don't suffer from compaction. This means it's possible for even the best cared for lawns to fall victim to ant infestations.

Lawn dwelling ants aren't normally the stinging kind but most species will definitely undermine your lawn's integrity by building intricate labyrinths of tunnels in grass root systems below your lawn's surface. Large ant colonies can cause significant root damage, as the ants eat through the root zone of the grass as they build their colonies. This can result in patches of dead grass appearing in your lawn. The other obvious issue is the ant hills above ground, which can become rather large. These unsightly mounds smother the grass and make your lawn bumpy, to say the least. They can make your lawn uneven and can pose a tripping hazard. They make mowing difficult as the lawn mower blades can get stuck on lumps of soil or kill the grass under the mounds of earth, especially if the grass is short.

## **HOW TO GET RID OF ANTS**

Finding ants in your yard is a nuisance, to say the least, especially if you meticulously take great care of your lawn or you're an avid flower or vegetable gardener.

Getting rid of ants can be a difficult task. If you do have an ant infestation that you hadn't noticed and it's huge already, it's best to call a professional pest control company. If it's not quite that severe of a problem, there's numerous measures you can take yourself to hopefully get rid of them.

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**Here's some of the best methods for getting rid of them. You've actually got some great options ---**

\* Firstly though, as effective initial preventative measures, be sure to do at least the following. The idea is to NOT make your lawn desirable to the ants. You want to take away anything on it that may give them reason to make their home on your grass:

- Firstly, always maintain your lawn and your soil to keep it healthy.
  - Ants prefer stressed plants and soil.
  - You will seldom see ant hills on vibrant healthy lush green lawns, but if they're struggling lawns, don't be surprised if you start to get some ant hills.
- Move any garbage cans or recycling or compost bins as far away from your lawn as possible.
- Remove any firewood pile, or any damp wood or decaying or infested wood debris, that may be laying on your grass or adjacent to your lawn.
- Similarly, if you happen to have a firepit in the midst of your lawn, keep it clean of debris and especially of any food scraps from the last cookout you may have had on it.
  - Foraging ants are always on the lookout for food sources.
- Remove any potential food sources that may be on your lawn, left there by mistake or whatever... especially sugary food or beverages (like supposedly empty beverage cans or bottles) that ants can access easily.
- Likewise, sometimes people will toss non-recyclable empty food cardboard containers into their firepit with the intention of burning it next time they're having a fire.
  - Remove those or burn them quickly so that ants don't see any leftovers in them as a viable food source.
- Avoid leaving stumps from removed trees within your lawn as ants will oftentimes re-purpose those into a new nest for their benefit.

\* Next, look for the obvious signs... foraging ants. You may see solitary ants doing their thing which may seem totally harmless, but they each have their purpose as they do their walk-about.

- Workers ants are always out and about scouting for new food sources.
  - They're not just going for a casual stroll. You can be sure they're doing their part for the benefit of their entire colony.
- Watch their patterns of movement, especially after the sun goes down, as that's when they're most active and seemingly when more of them come out of hiding.
  - That's when you're more likely to see a trail of busy ants at work.
- Locating the nest is the first step in taking care of the problem.
  - If you want to completely get rid of the ants in your lawn you MUST target the source, in other words, the nest.
  - A handy trick for this is to leave a sugary item out in the open as bait, or along what appears to be one of their often travelled trails, and then follow the ant(s) as it takes the food back to its nest.

\* For lower ant populations, or shall we say newer smaller ant colonies that haven't yet significantly increased their numbers, it may be easy enough to simply rake out the ant hills thereby scattering the ant population and reducing the hardened ant hills from occurring. Do this as often as you see them appearing, which could be more often than you might think. This "may" be enough to discourage them and make them move elsewhere, and hopefully off of your lawn. But if it's an already well-established larger colony, with multiple ant hills, forget that as it's not going to do much. The ant hills aren't the nest itself, they're just the entrance to tunnels that reach to the nest down below.

## **HOME MADE ANT DETERRENTS**

Consider the severity of your ant problem before resorting to chemical treatments. If you have children or pets playing on your lawn, you may want to avoid using potentially dangerous chemicals.

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While chemicals are generally more effective and almost immediate in their “kill” capability, there are natural methods or so-called DIY recipes suggested by many homeowners online, to get rid of ant hills and their occupants.

Home remedies have their drawbacks but do work well for some people, and for others not so much. The reality is, they often don’t work immediately, and for some situations may not work at all, or they may have other negative side effects you need to be aware of. Do your own diligence or experiments with these. We are not vouching for any of these as any “be all and end all solution”. Like I said, some homeowners have had success with the following and others not so much. It may also be a combination of some of the following that nets you the best results.

- If you’ve ever noticed, ants aren’t out and about when it’s raining... So that tells us something -
  - Repeated watering with a garden hose may encourage some ant species to move from the colony.
    - Most types of ants don’t drown easily, but it’s a hassle for them to deal with all that water.
    - Place the hose on the ant hill on a slow trickle for approximately 30 minutes every day or two.
    - The ants are not going to enjoy that and though they may try to dig some new tunnels to get away from it, too, they may abandon their home to search for a new place.
    - Creating some new tunnels and chambers to relocate the colony’s brood chambers or nurseries due to the water, may not be that easy, and the queen may consider moving the entire colony elsewhere.
- Pour boiling water into the ants’ nest -
  - This is perhaps the most widely known way to kill a nest where you simply find as many entrances as you can and pour boiling water into them.
  - Unfortunately, this often takes numerous attempts to get the job done effectively.
  - It can also result in wet, soggy areas within your lawn, and it can scald your grass causing it to turn brown, so be careful if doing this.
- Combine ½ teaspoon liquid dish soap, 1½ teaspoons of canola or olive oil and 1 quart of water in a mixing bowl, then transfer the solution over to a spray bottle -
  - Spray any infested area with high concentrations of ants and also pour the solution into the nest if you’ve located it.
    - This penetrates the ants’ exoskeleton and essentially suffocates it.
  - Again though, it can take a while to work.
  - The detergent can bleach the grass, too, making it paler than the rest of the lawn so be careful if doing this.
- Another option is to pour a litre of white vinegar into an ant nest -
  - The acidity can kill the ants on impact.
  - The reality with this approach is that though it kills ants on contact, it’s not apt to penetrate and kill the entire nest -
    - You’ll typically only kill the ants on the surface or perhaps in some of the nearest chambers within the nest.
    - Most nests are multi-chambered and multi-levelled and not penetrated that easily.
- Another option is to create a borax and sugar water spray to spray on the ants and the ant hill -
  - They can’t resist anything sweet so that’s the initial bait and then the borax does the rest.
  - The problem with this approach is that it needs to be mixed very precisely meaning if you don’t use enough boric acid, you won’t kill the ants. And it depends on the type and size of the ants, too. Plus, if you use too much, you’ll kill the ant that takes it before it’s even reached the nest.

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- The borax can also kill the grass if it's not diluted enough.
- Some people have had success with spraying various natural ingredients on ant hills to force them to relocate, such as: peppermint oil, cayenne peppers and powdered garlic -
  - I wouldn't imagine this to be a one-time application but would likely have to be repeatedly applied to where it becomes such a nuisance to the colony that the queen decides to relocate it, to hopefully off your lawn.
  - On that note... Relocations are not usually to new sites that far away... So always keep an eye on whether they've just happened to move a few meters away.
    - Sometimes it's easier for them just to dig some new tunnels, seal up some old ones, add some new ant hill entrances and presto, they can still use a lot of their old tunnel and chamber infrastructure.
- Spread diatomaceous earth on areas that have a high concentration of ants as well as pouring it into the nest - (Ensure you wear a dust mask for safety reasons upon application.)
  - The idea here is that you sprinkle this powder on your lawn and it'll cause decreased mobility in the ants and eventually they'll die of dehydration.
  - However, it's obviously not the quickest remedy.
  - It'll typically only kill the ants that come into contact with it, not the whole nest.
  - Plus, if it rains, it will wash the powder away – so you have to wait for a dry period.

**\* BY ALL MEANS, GIVE THE ABOVE HOME REMEDIES A TRY... They may or may not do the job for you. If not, or not enough, try the readily available professional ant killer products. They will give you the most reliable and quickest results.**

**\* Remember too, that there is no one magic solution to killing ants. It is always best to use a multi-faceted approach as well as ongoing concerted efforts to give you the best chance of removing them.**

## CHEMICAL ANT KILLERS

- There are many types of readily available chemical products that are made specifically for effective ant control.
  - Spot spraying is one of the best methods for killing ants especially when it comes to chemical sprays.
  - Given that ants tend to concentrate in their communities, spot application isolates the chemical zone and minimizes any potential damage to other beneficial insects who may call your lawn "home", too.
  - Use either a spray or granular form.
    - First, follow the ant trails and locate the nest, and then apply the chemical as indicated on the product label.
    - Granular forms require activation with water, so it is best to irrigate after applying the chemical.
    - In all cases, wait until a treated area has dried before allowing children and pets into the sprayed area.
- \*\*\* On a personal note, there's one chemical liquid product I've always used for ants that I've found to be very effective. I'm sure there are others like it that perhaps use the same ingredients (which I never tried) but I highly recommend the following based on my own personal experiences. I've recommended it to many of our clients who have likewise experienced the same results. That being said, you may or may not achieve the same results as there are many factors that can affect its effectiveness.
  - It's called Wilson Ant-Out (the liquid version, NOT the powder version)

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- I spray it wherever I see a trail of busy ants or the entrance to their nest or colony, and literally within minutes the ants start dying...
    - Or, by the next morning, depending how deep the nest is, I may end up seeing countless dead ants everywhere I sprayed and I suspect the same within the colony below the ground, too.
  - I have noticed that it works very effectively on tiny red and black ants but not quite as well on larger ants (though still more effective than most other deterrents or ant killers).
  - I have also noticed that whether it's that ants are getting smarter or more hardy, and if it's a larger colony, they may not all die but rather, some may possibly escape with the queen, and attempt to rebuild a new nest elsewhere, oftentimes relocating nearby, perhaps only a few meters away from their original location.
    - That means you'll be able to spray them there, too, once you see where they've relocated; so check nearby for any new nests or ant trails that may appear.
  - That being said, there's no doubt that it works well as you will clearly see the fatalities after using it.
  - NOTE: Unlike the bait stations that are left on the ground and may be found by other curious pets or critters, liquid sprays don't typically leave enough residue to be of any concern to pets, etc.
- Additionally, there are many types of ant bait stations or so-called "ant traps" available that are easy to use on your lawn or in your, perhaps adjacent garden.
    - They typically contain a similar active chemical ingredient that will kill the ants.
    - They're designed to be laid near and around the nest so the ants will feed on the liquid bait inside and take it back to their nest.
      - The active ingredient spreads through the nest and kills the whole colony at the same time if it's small enough to not be a big problem.
    - Some of these baits work very well, others not so much.
    - They take more time to do the job than the liquid sprays.
      - With a spray you're making contact with many more ants per each spray which will take it back into the colony, whereas with a bait trap, it will only initially get to those ants that enter the trap to eat the bait, and then they'll go back to the colony.
    - It's a good idea to place a bunch of these bait stations in and around your lawn (as well as several more all around any adjacent nearby garden) to kill off any ants before any colony can get well established.
      - Remember: Worker ants are always on the lookout for new food sources and/or new territory to establish new colonies, too.
    - NOTE: These bait stations do contain a chemical ant poison. However, it is contained within the box or container making it somewhat safe.
      - Most pets will tend to ignore the stations as there is nothing of interest to them but you may want to keep an eye on them when you first put them down or when your pet is outside and noticing them for the first time.

## TO SUM UP...

**I guess in a very real sense, we're in the ants' territory and they may have indeed been here before we were. But we're here now and if they become a problem we have to address it. If not then we can choose to accommodate them. As I said, the reality is... there are a lot more ants in our yard than we have any idea about. Insects are everywhere and always will be. But we can usually live in some degree of harmony with them unless something gets imbalanced... It's all a question of balance. Nature vs humankind. And, inevitably they cross paths and sometimes problems or challenges occur.**

**I hope this article has offered some good advice should you have an ant problem. Don't hesitate to give us a call if you have any questions or we can help you further. Good luck to you!**

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**\*\*\* SPECIAL NOTE \*\*\***

*We love helping our clients have great-looking lawns! Of course, we always welcome your inquiries, but we also want to help educate you, too. So many of you have told us how much you appreciate the articles we make available to you.*

*If there are any questions you may have about your lawn or any challenges or problems you may occasionally encounter with your lawn, don't hesitate to give us a call. As with the above info article you've just read, we also have other highly beneficial lawn care articles, too...*

*Here are some we've created to support you with your lawn care efforts. They can help you identify any problems as well as offer some possible solutions for some of those occasional challenges lawns can encounter.*

*These info articles are not meant to be one-time definitive cures for whatever might ail your lawn. We all wish it was only that simple... But, there are no magic "spray this once and your lawn will be perfect thereafter" solutions... Unfortunately, those don't really exist, as much as we might all like them to. However, there are many things you can do to get your lawn in great shape and keep it that way. We encourage you to glean what you can from any of the following articles that may interest you. And for what you're not sure about, give us a call, let's talk about it, and we'll do what we can to help you.*

*You may reach us at 780-678-6450 if you'd like to receive any of these via email. It would be our pleasure to do our part to help you "make your lawn the envy of your neighbours"...*

From Our "**PROACTIVE LAWN CARE**" Series Of Articles —

*7 Steps To A Great Lawn*

*Caring For Our Lawn Over The Winter*

*Proactively Preparing Your Lawn For Drought Conditions*

From Our "**WHAT YOU'RE NOT TOLD**" Series Of Articles —

*What You're Not Told About All-Natural & Organic Lawn Care Alternatives*

*What You're Not Told About Bats & Their Guano*

From Our "**WHY?**" Series Of Articles —

*Why Is My Grass So Thin?*

*Why Dead Spots On My Lawn?*

*Why Am I Getting Mushrooms In My Lawn?*

*Why Are The Pine Needles Killing My Grass?*

From Our "**HOW TO GET RID OF...**" Series Of Articles —

*How To Get Rid of Ants*

*How To Get Rid of Dew Worms*

*How To Get Rid of Fairy Rings*

*How To Get Rid of Quackgrass*

*How To Get Rid of Thistles*

...See more on next page...

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*Fixing & Preventing Dog Spots*  
*Damage Caused by Voles*

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*Common Lawn Fungal Diseases\_Leaf Spot & Melting Out*  
*Common Lawn Fungal Diseases\_Ascochyta Turf Leaf Blight*  
*Common Lawn Fungal Diseases\_Brown Patch*  
*Common Lawn Fungal Diseases\_Summer Patch*  
*Common Lawn Fungal Diseases\_Pythium Blight*  
*Common Lawn Fungal Diseases\_Red Thread*  
*Common Lawn Fungal Diseases\_Rust Diseases*  
*Common Lawn Fungal Diseases\_Powdery Mildew*  
*Common Lawn Fungal Diseases\_Dollar Spot*  
*Common Lawn Fungal Diseases\_Fairy Ring*

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## **INFORMATION ON OUR FIVE PRIMARY LAWN CARE SERVICES —**

### **FERTILIZER & WEED CONTROL:**

*Our Fertilization & Weed Control Program*  
*Possible Reasons For Still Having Weeds*  
*Ten Reasons Our Program is Different*

### **ENRICH SOIL ENHANCER:**

*Our Enrich Soil Enhancer Program*  
*Different Soil Types Have Different pH Levels*

### **WEEKLY MOWING:**

*How The Weekly Lawn Mowing Works*  
*Our Quality Control Program*  
*Ten Reasons We Are Different*

### **CORE AERATION:**

*Why Aerate Your Lawn?*

### **POWER RAKING:**

*Why Power-Rake Your Lawn?*

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