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## The Pest Bulletin

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# Spider Facts & Solutions

When the movie *Arachnophobia* hit the theaters in 1990, it was an instant hit—bigger than anyone could imagine. Of course it was pure fiction, or mostly so. There is simply no such thing as deadly drone spiders that fan out and kill everything in their path. Nonetheless, the movie hit on a deep-seated fear in humans. Surveys consistently show that spiders are some of the most feared creatures in the world.

There are over 3,500 kinds of spiders in the U.S., but only about 50 bite humans, and only a few are

medically important. The most important ones are the *black widow*, *brown recluse*, *hobo* (aggressive house), and *yellow sac spiders*. There are actually five species of widow spiders, and 13 of recluse spiders in the country, but the other species are either less common, have less potent venom, or are less likely to bite. A number of other spiders can cause varying amounts of local reactions, such as redness, swelling, and itching at the bite site.

Besides the bites, the main problem with spiders is that there can be so many of them, especially in the summer. None

of us likes spiders crawling around our homes, building sticky and ugly webs that need cleaning up. But spiders are so common, and an infestation can start so easily—simply by spiders crawling through a crack, or young spiders catching a breeze and using it to "parachute" to your home on a silk strand—that regular *professional treatments* are needed to keep spider numbers under control.

## Termite Prevention is Wise

Termites are among the most damaging and costly of all pests. Their damage to structures now causes an astounding **five billion dollars** a year in this country alone.

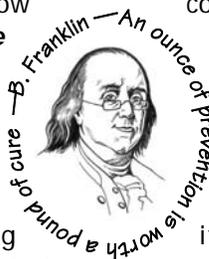
One reason termites can cause so much damage is that homeowners are often unaware for years that termites are eating their home. Most homeowners first see termites when they swarm, but a young colony doesn't send out swarmers until it is three to five years old. By the time swarmers are seen, termites may have caused substantial damage. Worse yet, an indoor colony often releases swarmers outdoors, so the homeowner never sees them.

How *fast* do termites work? A typical mature colony of 240,000 subterranean termites (some colonies are much larger) consumes an average of about 20 grams of wood in a 24 hour

period. This converts to about 16 pounds of wood removed each year per colony. You can be sure the wood was put there for a purpose, so removing it definitely weakens a structure.

Like a slow-spreading cancer, it's much better to catch the problem early. That's why it's important to have us do a regular, professional inspection to detect termites and other wood-destroying pests, as part of a preventative maintenance program to secure and protect your home.

Catching these pests sooner rather than later means you spend far less to control them. In addition, catching them early means the wood-destroyers have done less damage, which can save you thousands of dollars in repair costs. Benjamin Franklin would agree this is an especially *wise* investment!



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## Odorous House Ants Change in the City

Odorous house ants are one of the most widespread native ants in North America. In forests, they typically have small colonies of up to a *hundred ants* with *one queen*, often all living in a *single acorn*.

But these ants change when they move into urban areas. In a recent study reported in the journal *Biological Invasions*,



typical urban colonies averaged *58,000 ants* and *238 queens* each, and one huge urban super colony they discovered had *6 million workers* and *thousands of queens!*

Apparently life in the forest is pretty tough for odorous house ants, both because there is more competition for food, and because cold winter conditions force the ants into dormancy. In urban areas these ants simply move indoors in the winter to a warm spot, where they stay active and reproduce year-round.

Like many other pests around our homes and businesses, odorous house ants are able to completely alter their lifestyles in an urban environment, and become "super pests".

## Space Pest Humor & Trivia

The first spiders to be carried knowingly into space were aboard Skylab 3 in 1973. One spider spun a web as the space craft orbited the earth, basically inventing the *World Wide Web*.

Genesis 1, the first private spacecraft, was launched in 2006. It carried Mexican jumping beans, which are seeds that contain caterpillars of a moth. It seems this was a *giant leap* for Mexican jumping beans.



France placed the *first rat* on board a space flight in 1961. The next flight they sent up had the *first cat* on board. Some say they lost the rat somewhere in space, and didn't tell anyone.



## Your Questions Answered

**Q.** *What is the best way to remove a bee stinger?*

**A.** Everyone from beekeepers to physicians have been teaching that bee stingers should be **scraped out** rather than **pulled out**. This advice is based on the theory that if you try to pull out a stinger, you pinch the attached venom sac, forcing more venom into the wound.

Even though this seems to make sense, it turns out to be wrong! Recent studies have shown that **how fast** a stinger is removed is far more important than **how** a stinger is removed. The longer the stinger remains in your skin, the more venom it pumps into you, resulting in a larger welt.

Contrary to popular belief, venom does NOT get pumped in when the venom sac is pressed. There is a valve-like system, not influenced by squeezing, that pumps in venom.

So next time someone gets stung by a bee, don't stop to argue about the best way to get the stinger out—just get it out QUICKLY!

This news is especially important for people who have dangerous allergic reactions to bee stings.

## Record-Setting Termite Mounds



Unlike our subterranean termites, which build colonies hidden below ground, termites in some areas of the world build very visible, above-ground mounds. An unusually large mound recently found in a backyard shed in Australia was over *eight feet high*, and

home to more than *one million* termites. This nest was of a *wood-eating* *Coptotermes* termite, which is related to the destructive Formosan termite that is spreading in our country. Australia also has *grass-eating* termites, and their mounds can be even larger, up to a towering *13 feet high*.

## Alien Possums Wrecking Havoc

The brushtail possum was originally brought from Australia to New Zealand in 1837 to start a fur industry. But because New Zealand has no native mammals (except for two species of bats), it also has no natural competitors or predators of possums. The result has been an ecological disaster because New Zealand's environment is defenseless against pests like these. The possums have multiplied and now occupy 99 percent of the country.

These possums eat as much as *half a pound of foliage* a day. They can climb up into the forest canopy, where they denude or kill entire trees, altering the makeup of entire forest ecosystems. They also aggressively eat *eggs, chicks, and adults of native birds*, some of which are now close to extinction because of the possums. Even the kiwi, New Zealand's national bird, is under attack by this pest. And they spread diseases to livestock.

Government agencies now drop poison bait from helicopters in large areas of backcountry to control the possums, a technique which conservation organizations endorse because of the devastating effect these animals have on forests and wildlife.

