

Termites in the landscape

While most think about termites when it comes to their home there can also be termites that get on landscape elements and cause issues. Termites have protozoa in their hindgut that allow them to consume and digest cellulose (wood-based) material.

Native subterranean termites have nests in the soil and must maintain contact with soil or an above-ground moisture source to survive. If native subterranean termites move to areas above ground they make shelter (mud) tubes of fecal material, saliva and soil to protect themselves. Native subterranean termites may sometimes be found on wood elements in garden sheds, potting tables, fences, or other wood-based materials. They may also be found on tree stumps, dead limbs, or firewood.



Native subterranean termites.

Formosan termites are a more voracious type of subterranean termite. These termites have been spread throughout Texas through transport of infested material or soil. Formosan termites build carton nests that allow them to survive above ground without contact with the soil. Inside structures, nests are often located in hollow spaces, such as wall voids.



Formosan subterranean termites.

Formosan termites feed on a wider variety of cellulose than other subterranean termites, including live plants, consuming both spring and summer growth wood whereas native subterranean termites feed only on spring growth. Formosan termites have also been known to chew through non-cellulose materials such as soft metals, plaster or plastic. These termites

Drywood termites do not need contact with soil and reside in sound, dry wood. These termites obtain moisture from the wood they digest. Drywood termites create a dry fecal pellet that can be used as an identifying characteristic. They have smaller colonies- around 1,000 termites- than subterranean termites; they also do not build shelter tubes. In the landscape, drywood termites can be in trees, stumps, downed logs, dead branches, and can infest sound dry wood in structures, furniture, and other items.

Agricultural termites prefer to eat live grasses and weeds instead of dead wood. They make mud tubes and cover vegetation to protect them while they feed. These termites can sometimes be seen on lawns, fields with forage grasses, or sports fields.



Agricultural termite tubes covering grass.

For more information or help with identification, contact Wizzie Brown, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service Program Specialist at 512.854.9600. Check out my blog at www.urban-ipm.blogspot.com

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