



# Pest e-alerts



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## Termites: Spring Swarming Season in Oklahoma

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March, April and May are normal flight (swarming) months for subterranean termites in Oklahoma. However, ants also swarm during these months. Because swarming ants and termites can be similar in size and color, misidentification can easily occur. Each spring the Plant Disease and Insect Diagnostic Laboratory (PDIDL) within the EPP Department receives many inquiries concerning termite and ant identification. In this article, termite and ant photos are provided to assist with identification of termites and, therefore, recognition of this persistent, wood-destroying insect and its risk to your home and wooden structures. Homeowners should keep an eye out for swarmers as they indicate a possible infestation. But, presence of termite swarmers does not necessarily mean they are attacking a structure as they may have taken flight from outside soil or a nearby dead tree stump or wood pile. Therefore, a thorough exterior and interior inspection of the structure is needed to determine if an active termite infestation exists.



**Figure 1.** Swarmers (alates); 2/5- to 1/2-inch long. Dark brown or black body. Reproductive adults.

(Photograph courtesy Ronald F. Billings, Texas A&M Forest Service, Bugwood.org)

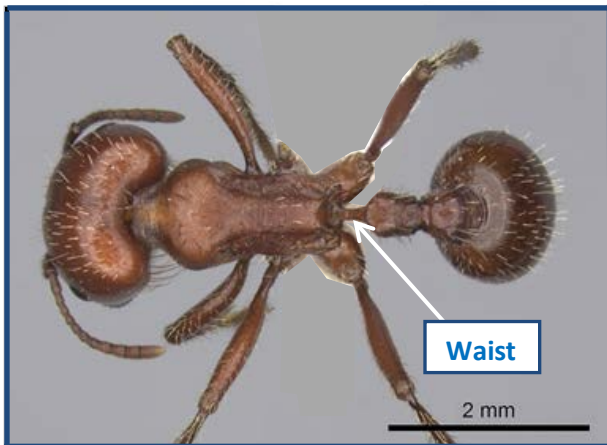


**Figure 2.** Termite Worker. 1/5-inch long. Creamy-white body with pale-orange head. (Photograph courtesy C. E. Konemann)



**Figure 3.** Termite workers and two soldiers. Note the large, rectangular, OSU-orange-color head of soldiers with its prominent dark-color mandibles. Soldiers measure 1/4-inch long. (Photograph courtesy C. E. Konemann)

### Red Harvester Ant



**Figure 4. Typical ant shape.** RHA is often found in grassy fields, with a circular area of bare soil 2-3 feet or greater in diameter where their nest is located. Worker-top view, about 3/8-inch long. (Photograph courtesy R. A. Grantham)

<u>Termites</u>	<u>Ants</u>
Antenna straight; String of beads	Elbowed antenna
Nearly equal size and shape front and rear wings	Front wings much larger than rear wings
Waist width same as thorax width	Constricted waist

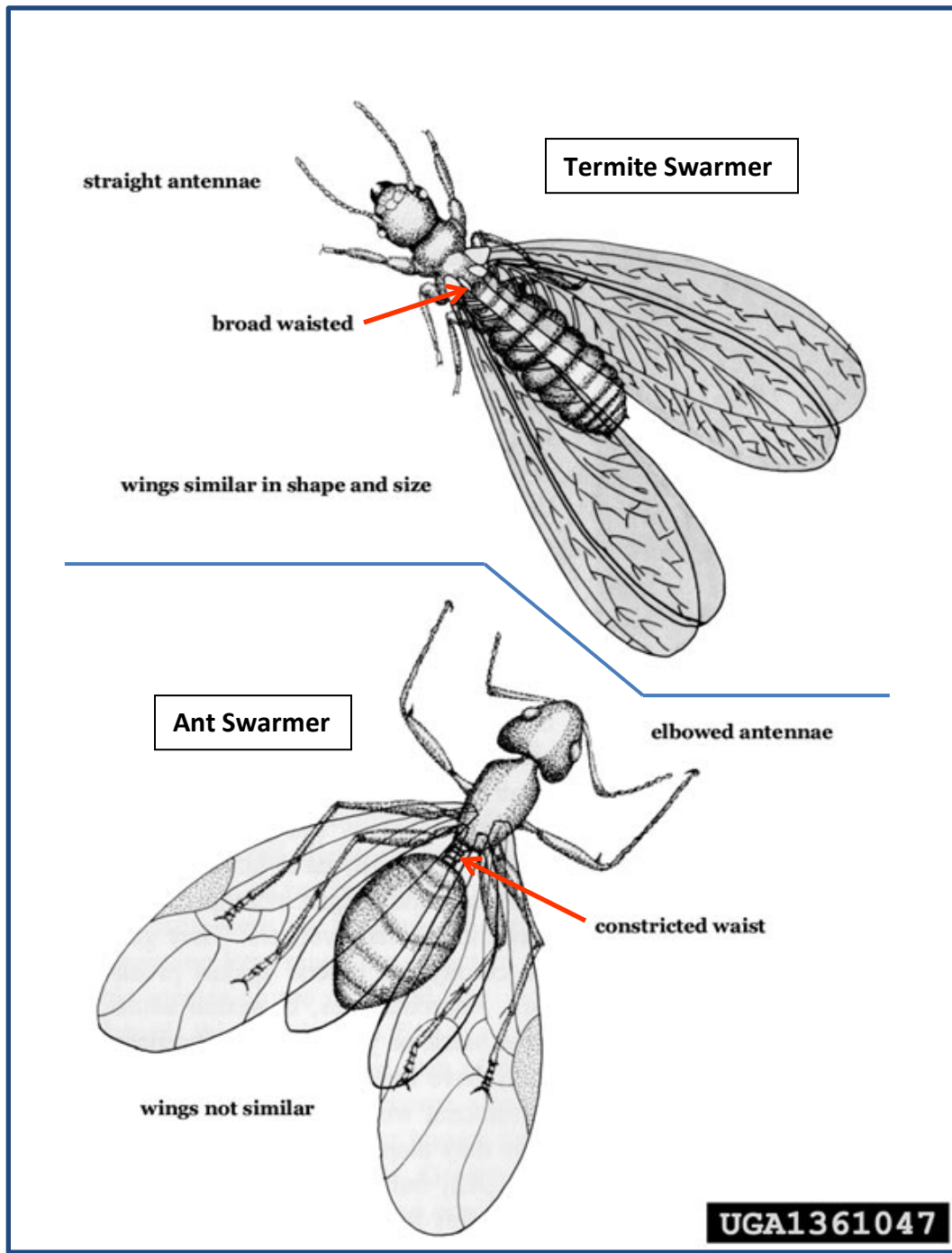
**Table 1.** Differentiating termites from ants. Main body shape differences. Termite and ant measurements do not include antennas.



**Figure 5.** Termite swarmer adults stuck on a wet window screen. These reproductive adults measure about 2/5- to 1/2-inch long including wings (antennas are not included in length measurements). All four wings are nearly equal in shape and length (Photograph courtesy USDA Forest Service).



**Figure 6.** Termite Swarmer (alate). 2/5- to 1/2-inch long, antennas not included. (Photograph courtesy Gary Alpert, Harvard University, Bugwood.org)



**Figure 7.** Ant swarmer (alate) compared with termite swarmer (alate). Termites measure 2/5- to 1/2-inch long with wings, antennas not included. Ant alates are 1/8-inch up to 1.0-inch long (Carpenter Ants) including wings. (Diagram courtesy USDA Forest Service, Bugwood.org)

## **Termite Management**

There are two primary strategies for preventing termite attack or eliminating an active termite infestation from a structure. The first is applying liquid insecticide (termiticide) around an existing structure perimeter to create a continuous insecticidal barrier in the soil to kill or repel termites. If the structure is under construction then a termiticide application to soil underneath the entire structure is also required (pre-construction treatment). A post-construction termiticide application can be done around the perimeter of an existing structure to kill termites in the soil and eliminate them from the structure. Liquid and foam insecticide applications can be applied inside wall voids by drilling through the sheetrock or other wall coverings and applying insecticide into termite infested locations. The second strategy is installing an insecticidal bait feeding system in the soil around a structure to kill termites. There are also above-ground bait configurations available for use inside structures. Baits are intended as a post-construction treatment. Termiticide labels and baiting system labels and instructions must be strictly followed for all applications.

If you suspect or have determined that your home is infested with termites, it is necessary to take quick control action as termites are persistent and will not go away. Contact a professional pest management company to schedule a thorough inspection, and discuss treatment options with the goal of eradicating termites from your home and other wooden structures. Termite management requires specialized equipment and professional knowledge and experience for success in defeating this persistent wood-destroying pest.

To access Fact Sheets go to <http://osufacts.okstate.edu>. Click on “Insects and Diseases-Topical List”, then click on “Integrated Pest Management-Insects” or “Home & Garden” and scroll down to EPP-7308, *Choosing a Pest Management Company to Protect Your Home Against Termites*, or EPP-7312, *Household Pest Control*. These publications provide additional information about termite biology and different management methods. You can contact your local Extension Office if you have questions. Also, many termite information sites are found on the internet.

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**Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service**

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