

Dig This for 9-24-08 (Flying Ants, Termites and Web Weaving Spiders) © 2008

Don't panic this time of year when you see flying ants and termites. Ants by nature once their colonies are established (usually after 3 years or so) have a flying stage where the reproducing males and females grow wings, leave the colony and set out to establish new ones. It sometimes seems like the flying ants number in the hundreds, but don't worry, very few of them actually survive. And, most of the time they make their new home in the woods and meadows, and not in or around our homes.

Most of the flying ants are black. But if you see red bodied flying ant appearing insects, look closer, they're termites. Termite bodies are flatter than ant bodies and they appear to the eye to have only two body parts - head and lower body. The bodies of ants in our area are nearly always black and on closer inspection have three distinct body parts - head, abdomen and thorax.

If you see either flying ants or termites emerging in large numbers around the foundation of your home or from underneath your home, you will want to take a closer look under the house to make sure they haven't made a home there. The WSU Publication EB1814 available online at <http://cru.cahe.wsu.edu/CEPublications/eb1814/EB1814.pdf> shows photos of termite and carpenter ant damage. If you see any of the signs shown in the photos in the publication you'll want to call a licensed exterminator.

Visit <http://www.colostate.edu/Depts/CoopExt/4DMG/Pests/flyant.htm> to see photos of flying ants and to learn more about this life cycle stage of ants. Another website www.antinstitute.com has ample information about ants. The Ant Institute says an ant can lift 20 times its body weight. There are 12,000 ant species worldwide and 700 of these ant species are in North America. Of the 12,000 species of ants worldwide only 25 species are considered structural pests. That's very good news.

This is also the time of year when we do the spider dodging dance throughout our gardens. The golden orb weaver spider (also called the brown orb weaver spider) likes to stretch its silky web throughout our gardens. These spiders festoon our doorways and porches too. Their webs are really a work of art. The webs are made out of silken protein. The spider patiently weaves its web over and over again. It collects and wraps its web back up on a regular basis. The spider eats the web giving its body much needed protein. Then begins weaving its web all over again. Speaking of protein each spider eats literally hundreds of insects, sometimes thousands, in its short lifetime.

Do not panic if you find yourself entangled in a spider web. As soon as our bodies collide with a web the spider drops from a silken weblines down to the ground. Can you imagine how absolutely humongous and monstrous we must appear to a spider? Especially since it sees several images of us at one time with its eyes. The only thing the spider wants to do is get away as quickly as possible. If you're careful you can actually unhook a whole web and move it aside leaving the spider happily nearby. Our gardens and houses would be overtaken with insects if it weren't for our friends the spiders.