



Termites in Mulch



Fig. 1. An inspection gap between mulch and siding on the home will allow anyone to see if termites are building mud tubes into a structure.



Fig. 2. Mulch that is too thick and obscures an inspection space will result in what is termed a “conductive condition” in the pest control industry. Irrigation heads that “water walls” is also considered a conducive condition.

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Termites are something we all fear in Alabama. A common saying is, “It’s not if you are going to get termites, but when.” Lately there have been many rumors swirling about the Internet concerning termites being spread throughout the country by large chain stores via bags of landscape mulch. It is my opinion that the greater risk to structures from termites are from the ones established in the yard as opposed to any termite stragglers that may be in mulch.

Termites can be found in mulch, but their survival is poor and here’s why: The ability of the termites to survive the chipping process to create mulch is not good; additionally, once separated from the colony, their ability to survive further decreases. Finally, even when termites are found in mulch, mulch-fed termites suffer significantly lower survivorship (*Long et al. 2001. The effect of organic and inorganic landscape mulches on subterranean termite foraging activity. Environ. Entomol. 30(5): 832-836.*)

In terms of spreading invasive species like the Formosan subterranean termite, the larger problem is transport of chunks of wood, including railroad ties used in landscape or salvaged timbers from razed structures. Transport and survival/establishment of termites, even the Formosan subterranean termite, in mulch is not likely.

This is not to say that termites are not found in association with mulch. I believe that mulch does contribute to termite infestations, but not because invasive species are spread with it, but because mulch serves to maintain conducive conditions for the termites, increasing their ability to survive where they are already established by keeping conditions moist and temperatures moderate. Mulch laid too thickly (>4-6 inches) can also provide a “bridge” over the treated perimeter of a house, allowing termites walk over from landscape to a building, avoiding soil termiticides.

Termites in mulch continued.

Realizing that mulch also helps keep mud from splashing up against a building, I recommend a thin layer (<2 inches) of mulch be placed within 12 inches of the foundation to allow the soil beneath to naturally dry. Desiccation is the termite’s worst enemy. Also avoid watering next to foundation walls. Finally, maintaining the soil barrier, bait system or wood protection measures for your house or structure will add another layer of protection from termites. (Remember to use a licensed and reputable pest control company.)

Remember too that termites are part of nature, so seeing termites swarm out of a stump or in mulch away from a building is not a cause for alarm.

The Louisiana Department of Agriculture has a quarantine order in place to prevent the spread of infested materials. To report a quarantine violation, call (225) 925-3763.

This information, as well as information on other termite and pest related issues, is available through the University of Florida EDIS publication system at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.

Mystery of the Month

What ant species commonly found in yards is a predator of fire ants?



Don’t be fooled by mound building ants. They are not all the dreaded fire ant. The photo above is the mound of a pyramid ant. The mound is a distinct pyramid or crater shape made of sandy soil. The pyramid ant does not sting and feeds on live insects including fire ants. Next time you are out in the school yard, see if you can identify the mound. You didn’t know there were pyramids in Alabama did you?

Mystery idea submitted by: Sebrina Benson BPS

Alabama Integrated Pest Management News.



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Don’t Forget the Clutterbug Award

We’re asking folks to e-mail us pictures of the worst cases of clutter they’ve seen (with permission from the clutterbug, of course). The “winner” will receive the *Clutterbug Award* for 2005-2006 and a free stack of storage bins!



**For more information on IPM in Schools
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