

## **Annual Termite Inspections**

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There are two kinds of homes in the state of Georgia, those that have termites now, and those homes that will get termites. East Tennessee and Georgia can have 8-12 colonies of active termites in every acre of land. Some homeowners do not believe an annual termite inspection is necessary if their home has had a previous treatment. Yet, annual home inspections for termites can prevent damage and expensive treatment cost.

For homeowners to understand the importance of termite inspections, they need to understand the basics of how a termite colony. A termite colony does not know the difference between dead wood on the ground the wood used to build a home or other type of structure. Eastern Subterranean Termites, the most common in our area, have four different castes that make up their colony: workers, soldiers, winged reproductives, and supplementary reproductives.

The workers are responsible for taking care of the colony and cause the damage seen in homes and other structures. The workers of an Eastern Subterranean Termite colony are identified by the milky white body and their round head. Termites are usually not found above the soil because they are susceptible to the elements of the weather. This is why they build shelter tubes. These shelter tubes protect termites from the cold of winter and the extreme heat of summer.

The soldier is the caste responsible for the protection of the colony against natural enemies like ants or centipedes. The soldier is identified by the large mandibles on the front of the head. The soldiers have an elongated head that will usually be an amber color. Soldiers are seen when a shelter tube is broken or if they are feeding underneath a rock and the rock gets disturbed. Soldiers are found in small numbers when the colony is not in distress. The soldier caste has to rely on the worker termites to feed him because of his long mandibles on the front of the head.

The primary reproductive is identified by two pairs of equal length wings, straight antennae, and a uniformly shaped body. These swarmers can be seen in the spring and summer swarming out of the nest site when the temperature and humidity are high. Swarming termites may be mistaken for ants because the average person cannot easily distinguish a swarming termite from a swarming ant.

Supplementary reproductives have no wing buds and develop as needed to replace an injured or dead primary queen. This caste develops along with the primary queen to assist in the egg laying process. If this reproductive caste is isolated with a group of workers, a new colony will form. This process can even happen above ground in a building if the new colony can locate a sufficient water source.

A well established termite colony can be found foraging up to 150 feet from the nest site and can cause significant structural damage in the foraging area. Even though a mature colony does not consume wood at a very fast rate, termites can do extensive damage if undetected. Eastern subterranean termites will consume up to three percent of their body weight in wood each day depending on environmental conditions, size of the termite, and the size of the colony.

The average mature colony can consume five grams or 1/5 ounce, of wood each day. It can take 118 days for a mature termite colony to consume one foot of a pine 2x4 wall studs.

Termites often can do damage to a structure and go unnoticed because the homeowner may overlook the sign of damage. During an inspection by a trained pest management professional, the only visible sign of termite damage may be a small mud tube in the crawlspace, attic, or even on the exterior of the home's foundation, behind shrubbery or tall grass.

Termite protection is provided in different forms. The cost associated will vary with the type of protection and the labor associated with the treatment. Comprehensive liquid treatments are the most labor intensive form of termite control. These treatments include treating block, brick, support piers, attached slabs and digging a trench inside and outside the foundation. Baiting systems are another way to protect a structure. The baiting system is installed to intercept foraging termites before they reach a home or building. The baiting system is installed every 10 to 20 feet around the structure and add-ons including decks, patios, and driveways. The baiting systems are effective because termites will find the bait station as they forage for food. A pest control company will also require an annual termite inspection to make sure that once a treatment or baiting system is in place, that active termites do not reenter the structure. A homeowner may also choose to have their home inspected every year for termites instead of treating with one of the different protection methods.

The most important part of a homeowner's protection plan is an annual termite inspection and the peace of mind that comes with knowing that the home, the biggest investment that most people will make, is being protected. The annual termite inspection is a form of insurance. Homeowners do not always realize that just because the structure has been treated for termites

that a re-infestation can occur and without this annual termite inspection the structure can be at risk for further termite damage and increased construction cost.

### References

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