

Terminate Termites in Your Brevard Home

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As if the love bugs weren't enough. There's something a lot more destructive than bugs splattering across car windshields: termites. The winged insects cause an estimated \$5 billion damage each year in the United States, and Florida's warm and humid weather makes the state a prime breeding ground. "The warmer and wetter the climate, the more termites we see," said Jim Fredericks, director of technical services for the National Pest Management Association in Fairfax, Va. The International Residential Code has a termite infestation probability map and Florida falls into the very heavy area.

Termites seem to be a bit worse this year in Brevard County, said Tony Joseph, branch manager for Orkin in Rockledge. He attributes the slight increase to the "right environmental factors at the right time." The main problem is subterranean termites, which live in the soil and feed on wood that comes in contact with that soil, he said. (The termites also build mud tubes from the soil to wood). But drywood termites, which do not require contact with the soil to live, still cause damage.

"Termites are silent invaders because you don't hear them," Joseph said. And while there are some signs of termite infestation, such as swarming, often "an owner does not know until a lot of the damage has been done," said Tampa termite attorney Pete Cardillo. "If you have termites, you've got to stop the bleeding."

Here's a guide to protecting your home.

Wood vs. concrete

All homes are susceptible to termites, whether wood-frame or concrete, Joseph said. Cardillo encourages prospective buyers to consider block construction to reduce the risk. Termites can climb over concrete and metal to get to whatever wood is available, Fredericks said. He points out that they eat any cellulose-based material. "They'll infest records, meaning like papers and files," he said. "I've seen them chew their way through books."

Preventative measures

Hire a termite company to protect your home, particularly if it's a wood-frame, Cardillo said. If you are having the home built, you can get a termite treatment before the concrete is poured. "If you are purchasing a home that is not new, you can get a treatment around the building," he said. Have regular termite inspections. Early detection will limit the amount of damage, Fredericks said. Orkin recommends a yearly inspection, which it provides free of charge.

Maintain property

Make sure the grading of the property does not cause water to pool, Fredericks said. Gutters and downspouts should direct water away from the home. Termite experts also recommend eliminating earth-to-wood contact. Any place where wood is in direct contact with the soil is an entry point for termites, Joseph said.

Repair any water leaks, and make sure the sprinklers aren't spraying water against the side of the house, Cardillo said. Termites love damp soil. Cardillo also suggests fixing cracks and holes in the foundation. "Make sure the siding is caulked and painted," he said. "It basically seals the building and keeps moisture from coming in.

Trim vegetation away from the house, Cardillo said. Besides contributing to a moist environment, it also prevents a professional from conducting a good inspection. Mulch shouldn't be too close to the house either, Joseph said. It provides a food source and moisture for termites.

Termites vs. ants

Swarming termites can be easily confused with flying ants, Fredericks said. He explained the difference this way. Termites have straight antennae, a broad waist and four wings that are equal in length. Ants have bent or angled antennae, a narrow waist and the front wings are larger than the hind wings.

Know signs

Flying termites are attracted to light, Joseph said. "Sometimes people will see them, especially if they are swarming inside the house, on windowsills and around door frames." Because termites discard their wings after they swarm, a homeowner may find small piles of wings around the home, he said.

One sign of subterranean termites is the pen-sized mud tubes they use to travel. These can be inside or outside of the house and can go in any direction, though vertical is the most common, he said.

Drywood termites leave behind pellets of fecal matter (frass) that usually are found in small piles, Joseph said. He compares it to a coarse sawdust. "Generally, that is noticed on the inside of the home," he said. "On the exterior of the home, it's usually blown away."

Other signs of termite infestation are cracked or bubbling paint (generally on the inside but it can be on the outside too) or wood that sounds hollow when tapped.

Keep an eye out

Pay attention. "If you do your own landscaping or lawn work, you're going to frequently have an opportunity to be on the exterior of your building and know what's going on," Cardillo said. "If

you don't, you have to make more of a conscious decision to periodically walk around the exterior of the building and look for signs of termite mud tunnels, that kind of thing."

Don't panic

"It's something that has to be dealt with, but termites are not going to destroy the house overnight," Fredericks said. "It's important to get the opinion of a professional to figure out what needs to be done."

Find professional

Termite control is not a DIY project, Fredericks said. He suggests getting multiple bids from a licensed or certified pest control professional. (You can find a professional at pestworld.org.) Joseph said treatment methods depend on the type of termite species, the construction and extent of the infestation, among other things.

Some pest control companies will make repairs if the structure is compromised. Others will not, Fredericks said. "Make sure whatever damage has been done is evaluated by someone who is qualified to determine if it needs to be repaired," he said. "In some cases, it's important structurally to have beams replaced or walls repaired."