

## Common Ants & Ant Control

To get rid of Sugar Ants or House Ants, known to the scientific community as Pavement Ants, sweet-based ant baits should do the trick. The pavement ant is perhaps the most common ant to invade houses, apartments, and other places where food can be found. It is mistakenly called both the sugar ant (which is an ant exclusive to the Australian continent) and the house ant (of which there are many). Pavement ants are the little brown ants that make small mounds in the sand near sidewalks, driveways, and the sides of houses.

There are several aspects to successfully controlling those bothersome little ants that always seem to invite themselves into your home for a drink and a snack every warm season. Your quirky Uncle Mo may like sitting in the kitchen discussing the weather with a few hundred of his closest ant buddies, but the rest of us prefer not to have ants as houseguests.

Pesticide companies would have you believe that all of their products provide the right solution to your ant problem. The huge number of cans of ant spray on the shelves at the store has us thinking that many of you buy into that theory, literally. But most uses of ant spray are doomed to failure because these products only kill the scouts and feeders. Meanwhile, back at the nest, which is almost always inaccessible to your spraying activities, the queen is pumping out hundreds and thousands more little ants, just for you. It's essential to get the poison back to the nest so you kill the queen. Worst of all, when you use these sprays, you're unnecessarily putting toxic poisons inside the place you live, eat, and breathe.

### STEP 1 IN SOLVING YOUR SUGAR ANT PROBLEM

The good news is that there is a cheap Secret Weapon you can use for your sugar ant problem. But before we get to that, there are some other things you should do as preventative measures to make your home less inviting and less accessible to the sugar ants in the first place:

- **Clean Up:**
  - Always keep the kitchen counters, table, and floor well wiped. Make sure you're getting behind countertop appliances, too, and as a one-time measure, you may want to pull out the range and refrigerator and clean the floor there too.
  - Clean crumbs or sticky spots from the bottoms of cupboards, and keep food containers tightly sealed.
  - Try to avoid eating in other rooms, where keeping things clean will be harder.
- **Seal Up:**
  - Caulk cracks outside where you can see that sugar ants are getting into the house. You can also try putting a band of diatomaceous earth along the foundation in the area(s) you see the ants trying to gain entry. (Diatomaceous earth is available at your hardware store or garden center.)

### THE SECRET WEAPON FOR KILLING ANTS

Now, about that Secret Weapon: It's just a mixture of boric acid and sugar water. The sugar in the mixture attracts the ants; the boric acid slowly poisons them after they eat it. Boric acid is usually available at your local drug store.

There are several secrets to success for using this potion:

- a. **Ratio** — The proportion of boric acid to sugar water is important. If you make the mixture too weak, it won't kill anything; if you make it too strong, it will kill the foragers before they can get back to the queen and deliver the poisoned food to her. We've found the following mixture to be about right: 1 cup water, 2 cups sugar, 2 tablespoons boric acid. You can make a smaller amount—you won't need much—just keep the proportions the same.
- b. **Placement** — Put little drops or dribbled lines of the mixture on the counter or floor—wherever you've seen the ants. You need to make sure they'll find it. **IMPORTANT:** While boric acid is far less toxic than most commercial chemical pesticides, you still do not want kids or pets ingesting this sugary but tainted mixture. Take precautions so that this does not happen.

- c. **Courage** — You **MUST** resist the temptation to wipe up the masses of little ants when they are feeding on the sugar-boric acid mixture. Remember, you're using the foragers as a payload delivery system to get your weapon to the source of the problem, the queen. Letting the foragers get their fill means you will have to endure something of a horror show—teeming masses of black ants on your counter, table, or floor. Yeech! It will take 24-48 hours for the freak show to run its course, so just be patient. By the end of 3 days, your problem with the little ants should be all cleared up.

### THE SUGAR WATER/BORIC ACID SOLUTION MAY NOT KILL ALL ANTS

Realize that there are many, many types of ants, and your mileage may vary when you try the boric acid solution. If the above mixture has not significantly reduced the flow of ants after a couple of days, you can try increasing or decreasing the amount of boric acid in the mix to find the right potency for your particular ants. We found the proportions listed above to be extremely effective at controlling sugar ants in the Mid-Atlantic region of the US, but that mixture did not control similar ants when we moved to the Appalachian region—they just ate up all the solution we put down and did not die.

Here in the heartland, though, we have been able to solve our problem with little black ants by taking the original solution and mixing in a little tahini (sesame butter) and some extra boric acid. We've also used a mixture of boric acid powder with peanut butter and jelly (smooth peanut butter plus *jelly*, not jam, and made with real sugar). Apparently the ants like the combination of fat and sugar, just like us!

We don't have exact proportions documented yet for either the tahini or PBJ approaches, but in each case the proportion of boric acid to the total volume is much higher than in our sugar-water mix. But remember, there *is* such a thing as too much boric acid—the queen must die, and the workers must survive long enough to get the poisoned food to her. That said, if your particular ants are still in full force 48 hours after you try the original boric acid/sugar water mix, it's time to start experimenting with stronger potions and different ingredients.

A similar approach was suggested by reader Hal in Texas, who wrote to let us know that his particular breed of troublesome little ants avoided sugar. However, he observed that they did not appear to have any restrictions on fat intake, and so Hal succeeded with this approach: "At least for the ants that I am having problems with, it appears that 1/8 teaspoon of boric acid powder to 1 tablespoon of mayonnaise or Miracle Whip is pretty close to the right ratio." Cool! Thanks for letting us know, Hal!

Pesticide manufacturers make prefabricated ant baits that work in a fashion similar to the boric acid mixture, but they often contain more toxic pesticides. It's best to start with the least-toxic solutions; then, if they fail to do the job, move up the chain of more and more potent pesticides. But remember, an ant bait that is too poisonous to the forager ants will not solve the problem because they'll die before they reach the queen.

Different food sources or poisons are sometimes needed, but the "bait and kill" approach is almost always the only way you will be successful at tackling an ant problem.