

# INVASIVE ANTS



Figure 1 - Argentine Ant

## Introduction

A number of invasive ant species have established in New Zealand. Two ant species of particular concern are outlined here, but if you find any unusual ants please contact Environment Southland to have them identified.

**Argentine ants** are native to Argentina and Brazil. They are one of the world's most invasive and problematic ant species.

Argentine ants:

- are 2-3 mm long and light to dark honey-brown (unlike most house ants, which are black);
- are highly active in searching for food;
- travel steadily in defined continuous trails up to five or six ants (or 2 cm) wide, and travel up trees and buildings;
- walk or swarm over objects, people or animals;
- eat sweet things, but will seek out eggs, fish, meat, dead insects and other small animals;
- like warm, dry places and nest almost anywhere, but especially on the ground under timber, metal or concrete, plant pots, boats, and caravans;
- are excellent infiltrators! Screw-top jars, closed microwaves, stoves and fridges do not always stop them.

**Darwin's ant** is similar in appearance to the Argentine ant but workers are easily distinguished in the field as they give off a strong odour when crushed (there is little or no odour for Argentine ants).

Argentine and Darwin's ants have not yet established in the Southland region. Both of these ant species are found as far south as Christchurch. Early detection of this unwanted insect when it arrives in Southland is essential.

If they are discovered here, the aim will be to eradicate them, if at all possible.

## What is the problem?

Argentine and Darwin's ants rank highly as a domestic nuisance species. These ants are able to set up new colonies when their nests are moved in freight or in pot plants. Their natural dispersal is slow.

If left unchecked, Argentine and Darwin's ants will become a major household and garden pest. These ants can also cause significant economic loss to horticulturalists through their habit of farming sap sucking insects.

Argentine ants can form super-colonies of immense size which would have adverse impacts on the region's biodiversity and economic values. Argentine ants threaten native insects, lizards and native birds, either by attacking them directly, or by competing for food.

## Pest Classification

Argentine and Darwin's ants are **Exclusion** animals throughout the Southland region.

## Strategy Rules

1. No person shall possess, sell, offer for sale, propagate, transport or release any Argentine or Darwin's ants within the Southland region.
2. All sightings of Argentine and Darwin's ants in Southland must be promptly reported to Environment Southland.

## Control

If you suspect that you have Argentine or Darwin's ants on your property, bring a sample in a well sealed container with your name address and phone number to Environment Southland.

Argentine and Darwin's ants are extremely difficult to control. Environment Southland will undertake control if eradication is feasible.

**WARNING: Do not try to control Argentine or Darwin's ants yourself. Incorrect treatment will be largely ineffective and can make the problem worse. Contact Environment Southland immediately.**

## Advice & Information

To find out more information contact:

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Private Bag 90116, Invercargill

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