

THE FACTS ABOUT TERMITE SWARMS

Swarmers:

In the insect world, the word “swarm” has different meanings that conjure up different images. Killer bee “swarms” that rush out of their hive to attack are acting aggressively and defensively to protect their hive. In contrast, a honey bee “swarm” looking for a new nest site for their queen is very docile and not likely to sting. They also stay tightly grouped together. Termites “swarms,” on the other hand, are neither aggressive nor tightly grouped. A termite swarm is an event in which certain environmental conditions trigger a great number of winged termites to simultaneously fly from their nest (*about 600-900 feet*) to mate and locate new nest sites and food sources. Once matched, a “royal couple” burrows into the ground where the queen begins to lay eggs.

Behavior and survival:

When a swarm occurs, winged termite swarmers called alates emerge in large numbers from cracks in buildings or holes in the soil through swarm tubes made by worker termites. Only a small percentage survive to form new colonies. Many are eaten by predators like birds, bats, and other insects. Or they die from natural causes and environmental conditions before they can locate a mate and nest site. Researchers generally agree that it takes years before a newly established colony will produce termite swarmers. With favorable conditions, it may take 4 years before a colony produces swarmers; with less favorable conditions, it will take longer.

Other factors that trigger a swarm:

A side from natural swarm cycles, other environmental conditions can trigger a termite swarm. A swarm can be triggered by a diminishing food supply, lack of water to support a colony and, in some cases, application of regular pesticides. Synthetic pyrethroid-type termiticides work by repelling termites from a structure and can cut off termite movement from a structure to required moisture sources in the soil. Under these circumstances, the termites—whether located in the soil or within the structure—would be stressed from either a lack of food or water and swarming may be the response to ensure survival.

When and where swarms occur:

Swarms occur at different times of year—and day—for different termite species. Most of the native subterranean species swarm in the spring and to a lesser degree in the fall, usually after a rain. In Louisiana, peak swarm season for the Eastern subterranean termite occurs from February through April. Both the Eastern and Western subterraneans swarm during daylight hours, but the Formosan subterranean termite prefers warm evenings in late spring to early summer, especially after a rain. Swarming for Formosans starts at sundown and ends before midnight. Residents of the Greater New Orleans area can attest to this termite’s prolific activity during their peak swarming period when large numbers of swarmers are seen around city lights as they are attracted to lights. One recommendation is to turn off all exterior lighting during these Formosan swarms to avoid them from entering your home or business. Remember that all swarmers cause NO structural damage to buildings, they are an indicator that there is a termite colony near by.

THE FACTS ABOUT TERMITE SWARMS

Inspecting for swarms:

Swarms that appear within a home after a termiticide treatment do not pose a threat for a new infestation. Homeowners may contact their Pest Management professional (PMP) to control the swarms so they're not a nuisance, but in most cases, vacuuming the dead swarms is all that's needed. If a swarm occurs before a termiticide treatment, a PMP should perform a thorough inspection of the structure to recommend the best method of control.

Assessing infestation:

The presence of many swarms (*hundreds*) in an untreated structure indicates a termite infestation. In some cases, though, the presence of a few swarms, or only their wings around windows and doors, etc., may not necessarily mean that the structure is infested. It may simply indicate the presence of an outdoor colony near the structure; swarms are attracted to a structure's lights. What's more, even heavy swarms outside and near a building may not indicate an infestation at all. But in all of these cases, it's prudent to have a PMP thoroughly inspect the structure.

Termidor and swarms:

Termidor termiticide is a non-repellent chemical. Termites can't smell it, see it, or feel it. Since they don't know it's there, they forage freely in a treated area. Its toxic effect to termites is slow compared to many other termiticides, so no immediate threat is realized by the colony and swarming is not triggered by a Termidor treatment.

Termidor control:

Termidor kills termites through ingestion, contact, and through "The Transfer Effect™." The active ingredient in Termidor—fipronil—is slow acting and allows the termite to continue its normal routine. But the termite remains active long enough to transfer the termiticide to a large number of other termites in the colony before dying itself. This combination of ingestion, contact, and "Transfer Effect" (*which is unique, puts Termidor in a category by itself*) **routinely provides 100% termite control in 3 months or less.**

Swarms after treatment:

Occasionally, homeowners report swarms after a Termidor treatment. These are probably coincidental and have less to do with the treatment and more to do with the time of year, environmental conditions, and the termite colony's size and health. The colony may have been in a "biological mode" to swarm at that time, which happened simultaneously with the Termidor application. Swarms occurring soon after a termiticide treatment may or may not be linked to the treatment, but in either case the swarm would not indicate a failed treatment. Importantly, a responsible termite control program demands periodic inspections by a licensed PMP.