

Household Pest Ant Control by Homeowner

Scott A. Russell, Extension Agent: I.P.M.

Cooperator: Vicki McAlester

Summary: Vicki McAlester, a resident of Farmers Branch, had a household pest ant problem for an extended period of time. Numerous treatments Vicki had used only seemed to move the ants. Extension Agent Scott A. Russell suggested the use of a new bait station product and Mrs. McAlester agreed to work with Texas Agricultural Extension Service as a cooperator. Bait stations were placed along the ants' foraging trails in the kitchen and bathroom. Mrs. McAlester reduced her use of contact insecticides and has nearly eliminated the ants.

Problem

Mrs. Vicki McAlester had a problem with Pharaoh ants (*Monomorium pharaonis*) in her home. The ants first appeared in the kitchen, then after treating the ants using diatomaceous earth, they appeared in the bathroom. She contacted Texas Agricultural Extension for information. According to Mrs. McAlester she has had problems with ants for more than a year and had tried numerous methods including: contact insecticidal sprays, bait stations and diatomaceous earth products. Each time the ants seemed to move rather than be eliminated.

Objective

To teach homeowners the proper use of bait-formulated insecticides, thus reducing household exposure to contact insecticides.

Materials and Methods

MaxForce® FC Professional Insect Control Ant Bait Stations (fipronil) were provided by Karen Carlton, The Clorox Sales company. The home was inspected and significant ant activity was located in the kitchen pantry with several foraging trails throughout the kitchen area. Ants were found to have eaten through a closed bread bag, thus requiring that the bread be discarded. Ants were also located within the bathroom under the sink and around the bathtub. On August 9, 1999 several MaxForce® FC Professional Insect Control Ant Bait Stations were placed in various locations around the kitchen and bathroom. Stations were placed alongside foraging trails where ants were likely to find them. Ant trails were washed with warm soapy water and food sources removed. Mrs. McAlester was instructed not to use aerosol insecticides in the vicinity of these stations, since this will reduce their effectiveness by repelling the ants, and to be patient as baits are slower-acting than sprays. Ant specimens were collected and identification confirmed them to be Pharaoh ants.

Results and Discussion

After thirty days, there were noticeably fewer ants foraging. After sixty days the number of foraging ants began to rebound. The cooperator purchased new bait stations and replaced the previously installed stations in the infested areas. Vicki McAlester now reports that the ant numbers continue to drop. She has also reduced the use of insecticidal sprays.

Economic Analysis and Impact

Consumer ant bait stations vary in cost and availability. Clorox also manufactures a comparable consumer product under the name Combat® Quick Kill (fipronil). Depending on the outlet (and active ingredient), bait stations may cost between \$0.55 and \$2.99 each in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. At a median price of \$1.22 each a single treatment using six bait stations would cost the consumer \$7.32 (these might need to be reapplied). When compared to hiring a commercial pest control firm at prices ranging from \$81.19 to \$225.00 for a single treatment, a patient and diligent consumer can save a substantial amount of money.

Do-it-yourself pest control is not the answer for all pest problems. Hiring a professional may be appropriate in cases where individuals are sensitive to pesticides, in an area that is ecologically sensitive or when one has been unsuccessful at controlling a pest.

Conclusions

Pharaoh ants can be controlled in the home with less toxic ant-specific bait stations when used properly and when one is diligent to replace old, empty stations. Household pest ant control is often difficult because consumers are not patient enough to allow baits the appropriate amount of time to work effectively, and control may require multiple approaches. Professional pest control operators offer many different types of service including the use of baits, low impact control methods and insect specific products or application techniques. Persons doing pest control in a structure for hire must be licensed by the Structural Pest Control Board of Texas and individuals applying their own pest control must follow all label directions.

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