

All About Termites



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Information about termites could fill a book. So let's hit the highlights – the most important things that you need to know as a homeowner. Here in the mountains of North Carolina we have Eastern Subterranean Termites, which live underground in the soil, and are the most widespread and destructive group of termites in the United States and can include the aggressive Formosan species. Termites cause over two billion dollars of damage a year to our homes. They have been around since the time of the dinosaurs. They are voracious wood eaters (a Formosan colony can consume up to 1,000 pounds of wood a year) and did you know they also eat wallpaper and plastics? They can destroy building foundations, wooden support beams, plastic plumbing pipes, sub-flooring, and insulation. Winged adult termites, called swarmers, look like flying ants and emerge from the colonies on flights to search for more nesting areas during the spring. A single colony can contain 2 million members. No wonder a chill of fear spreads through you when you hear the word “termite.” Yes, they are like little monsters. Last week we were concerned about carpenter ants, but termites are the king and queens of destruction.

When I inspect a home, I always advise the buyer to get a termite inspection from a qualified pest control company, as well as a thorough general pest inspection. For the small fee that these companies charge, you will be well served by identifying serious problems now and treating your home to keep pests from damaging it. Not only do you want termites identified and treated, but our spring and summer weather in the mountains brings in mice, spiders, scorpions, and an assortment of other walking and crawling pests. I don't know about you, but I would rather not meet ANY of these creatures inside my home.

The steps to take to keep termites away from your home also work well for other pests. Think dampness and access. First, take a walk around the outside of your home. Where is the soil level? Is it at least 6-8 inches below your wood siding? If it's closer than that, you are inviting termites in for a meal. Is the soil damp near the house? If it is, your gutters are not doing their job and should be repaired. Is there any wood stored alongside the house? You should put this somewhere else. Termites and other creatures love wood and wet conditions. Now take a look at the slope of your soil (called “grade”) around the house. It should be sloping away – at least one inch per foot for at least six feet – to keep water from pooling near your foundation wall.

On the upslope of your mountain home you should have drains or a swale to keep water away. Dry soil next to your foundation will also mean your basement or crawlspace will stay dry.

Now look around windows and doors, inside and outside. Be careful; if you're not comfortable climbing up to see around windows and look at eave areas, ask a handyperson to do this. You want to make sure that doors and windows are fully sealed and caulked – as well as all areas of your foundation wall – to make sure nothing can get in to your home. You'd be surprised what I find on inspections – sometimes there is a one inch gap at the bottom of the main entry door to the house. We go in and out and never look – meanwhile creatures have an open invitation to the inside of your home.

Remove dampness and access, combine with a periodic professional evaluation, and you will be able to sleep at night without the termite monster nightmare!

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