



# VARMET GUARD®

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Common Name: **Acrobat ants**  
Scientific Name: ***Crematogaster* species**

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## ACROBAT ANTS

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**Introduction.** Acrobat ants' common name is descriptive of these ants' habit of raising the abdomen over the thorax and head, especially when disturbed. Various species are found throughout the United States, a few of which are common in Ohio.

**Recognition.** Acrobat ant workers are 1/8 inch long and the queens range up to 3/8 inch long. They are light brown to black and some species are multicolored. The thorax has 1 pair of dorsal spines. The waist (pedicel) has 2 segments (nodes) and is attached to the upper side of the gaster (large, main portion of the abdomen). The gaster is heart-shaped from above. A stinger is present but is rarely used. Workers of many species emit a repulsive odor when alarmed.

**Similar Ants.** Other 2-node ants having the pedicel attached to the top of the gaster do not have a heart-shaped gaster.

**Damage and Signs of Infestation.** Often the only exterior indication of damage is the accumulation of debris expelled by these ants, especially if the debris is rigid foamboard insulation. They prefer wood softened by decay fungi or rigid foamboard insulation, but may enlarge cavities in wood made by other insects. They will occasionally strip the insulation from electrical or telephone wires which can cause short circuits.

**Biology.** Most structure-infesting acrobat ants are described as nesting in moderate to large colonies. Probably the most commonly encountered species is *Crematogaster lineolata* having workers 1/8 inch long, males 1/8 inch long, and females 1/4 to 3/8 inch long. This species varies greatly in color. Many of the species, including

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*C. lineolata*, tend aphids. Swarmers have been observed in nests or swarming from mid-June to late September. The odor emitted by *C. lineolata* resembles mammalian feces.

**Habits.** Inside structures, acrobat ants typically nest in wood which has been subjected to high moisture and fungal decay, the same wood conditions favored by carpenter ants and termites. Similarly, they will nest in rigid foamboard insulation panels and in wall voids. Outside, most species nest under rocks, in logs, firewood, or trees where decay enables them to tunnel under the bark and/or into the wood. They occasionally will nest in abandoned termite and carpenter ant galleries as well as old wood borer and powderpost beetles tunnels in structural wood.

The workers readily enter structures by trailing along tree lines and utility lines as well as along the rails of connected fences and decks. They enter via cracks and utility penetrations, window frames, soffits, etc. Workers also will trail across the ground and enter via door thresholds, weep holes, and other openings or cracks. They have been found to trail over 100 feet.

Acrobat ants feed on honeydew from aphids and mealybugs which they usually tend or “herd”. They also feed on live and dead insects, including termite swarmers. Indoors they show a slight preference for sweets and high-protein foods such as meats.

When disturbed or alarmed, workers of all but the smallest colonies tend to be quite aggressive. They are quick to bite, and give off a repulsive odor.

**Cultural Control & Preventative Measures.** Inspection is the key to successful control and the inspection methods are similar to those used for carpenter ants. When worker ants are found indoors, the first place to inspect is the structure’s exterior; one should look for: (1) trailing ants on the foundation, (2) bits of foamboard insulation which would indicate a nest behind the exterior sheathing or siding, (3) trailing ants on all wires, utility lines and pipes coming into the walls, (4) trailing ants on tree and shrub branches in contact with the wall and (5) signs of excessive moisture such as peeling paint on wood thresholds, soffits, window frames, trim and molding. Acrobat ants that are foraging from the outside can be kept out by filling obvious cracks and crevices using silicone sealer, builder’s putty, mortar patch, etc. Tree and shrub branches should be trimmed away from the roof and walls to prevent bridging contact points.

In the yard, one should inspect logs, stumps, firewood, tree cavities, dead tree limbs, and loose bark for ant nests. Also, one should look under rocks and debris lying on the ground for ant nests.



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Indoors, it is important to investigate current and past areas of excessive moisture and consider past water leaks, plumbing problems, etc. A moisture meter is useful to detect areas of high moisture. Areas of old termite and carpenter ant damaged wood, if recognizable, should be checked for ant activity.

**Professional Control.** Outside, a full perimeter treatment will be applied by a Varmant Guard technician using a residual liquid insecticide. Acrobat ant nests located in structural wood will be treated by injection with residual insecticide, aerosol or dust formulations. Nests in wall voids will be treated by gaining access via electrical outlet and plumbing penetration holes and injecting a dust or aerosol insecticide. Nests located in wallboard behind siding and in structural voids will be treated using high pressure aerosol injections with non-residual and residual insecticides.

If ornamental plants and shrubs are infested with aphids, scale insects or mealybugs, the customer should have these treated by an arborist or landscape care professional to discourage acrobat ants from foraging thereon.