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Common Name: **Small honey ant / false honey ant / winter ant**
Scientific Name: **Prenolepis imparis**

SMALL OR FALSE HONEY ANT



Introduction. This ant probably gets its common name of small honey ant from its small size, and because it is very fond of honeydew, engorging itself until its abdomen swells up like a tiny balloon. The common name of false honey ant is intended to separate this species from the larger true honey ant, *Myrmecocystus* species. Both ant species have a special “caste” of workers called repletes or honey-casks which hang from chamber ceilings and store honey. The name winter ant is descriptive of the low temperatures at which these ants continue to forage (e.g., $\geq 32^{\circ}$ F).

Recognition. Worker ants are 1/8 inch long and are light to dark brown with the abdomen usually darker. The body is smooth and shiny but has numerous hair-like setae dispersed over it. The thorax is slender, with an uneven profile. The waist (abdominal pedicel) is 1-segmented (one node). This ant has no stinger and is not known to bite.

Similar Ants. Other small 1-node ants include the odorous house ant, which has the node hidden beneath the front of the gaster. The small honey ant does not give off a pungent odor when crushed as does the odorous house ant. Similar-sized two node ants include the pavement ant and acrobat ant.

Biology. Small honey ants nest deep in the soil, in shady, moist areas. Occasionally they may nest under objects such as stones. The nest has a single central opening, surrounded by a somewhat circular crater of characteristic earthen pellets. The nest is typically 18 to 51 inches deep with a single tunnel (spiral-shaped access shaft) from which branch about 6 to 40 lateral chambers. Colonies are small, averaging about 1,580

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adults (range 48 to 2,208). The number of queens varies from 1 to 6, often with one. Developmental time (egg to adult) is about 70 to 90 days.

Swarming takes place from March to April, with most of the mating occurring on the ground. Inseminated females seek a crevice in the ground to start a new nest. Brood (larvae) and pupae are present into the autumn but only the adults overwinter.

Repletes are typically present. These are workers which cling to the chamber ceilings with their gaster greatly distended with honeydew. They serve as living food-storage vessels for times of adverse food conditions.

Habits. Small honey ants sometimes nest in soil associated with slab expansion joints and occasionally swarm indoors during the winter and early spring months. Small honey ants are very cold tolerant, more so than any other structural-infesting species. Workers forage at night, during cool or cloudy days, and during rains. Foraging starts with temperatures just above freezing and peaks with temperatures of 45 to 70° F. In midsummer, they sometimes aestivate (no activity) for 1 to 2 months during the hottest weather. They prefer high relative humidity when foraging. They readily forage in trails.

Outside, they are extremely fond of honeydew and will tend honeydew-producing insects such as aphids, scale insects, treehoppers, whiteflies and mealy bugs. They feed on live and dead insects, juices of over-ripened fruits, and will extract the sap or juice from flower buds, tender plant shoots, and the germinating seeds of long leaf pines. They commonly forage indoors where they feed on such foods as sweet corn, ketchup, cakes, breads, sugar, honey, syrup, soft drinks, watermelon and other fruits.

Cultural Control & Preparatory Measures. It is wise to quickly clean up food (including pet food) and beverage spills from floors, countertops, porches and decks to discourage foraging by these ants indoors and near residences/buildings. Food items should be stored in airtight containers, if possible.

Outdoors it is always a good idea to seal potential exterior entry points such as around window and door frames, utility line entrances and missing or cracked mortar joints. Weep holes in brick veneer walls can be stuffed using steel wool or copper gauze. It is important to trim back tree and shrub branches that are in contact with the structure to prevent ants and other pests from bridging.



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Professional Control. Small honey ant control begins with a thorough inspection. If workers are found inside a structure, a Varmen Guard technician will follow the trail to where they disappear which is almost always into an exterior wall or slab expansion joint.

Once the foraging trails have been traced, treatment may consist of strategic placement of sweet liquid or gel ant baits or crack and crevice applications using an appropriately labeled residual insecticide. Injection using a high-pressure aerosol with 4-way probe is particularly effective. Nest drenching can work but more than one treatment may be necessary for deeper nests.

Baiting with sweet baits alone can eliminate colonies. An exterior perimeter (barrier) application using a residual liquid insecticide formulation can be used for long-term prevention.