

SWARMING TERMITES – What Does it Mean?

Ralph E. Mitchell, Director/Horticulture Agent - Charlotte County UF/IFAS Extension Service

REM-03302009-011

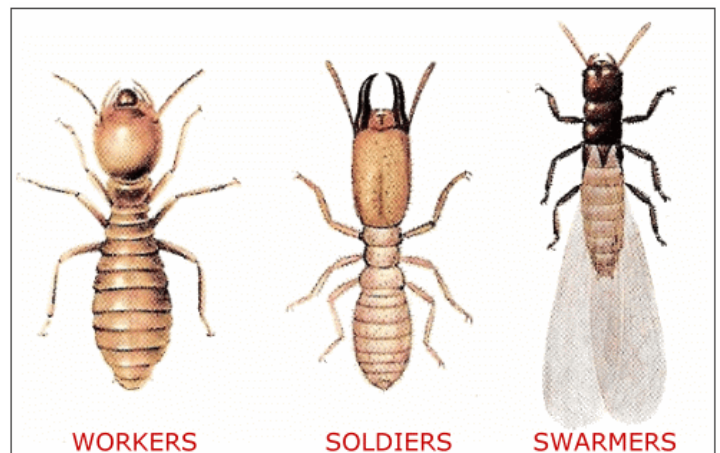
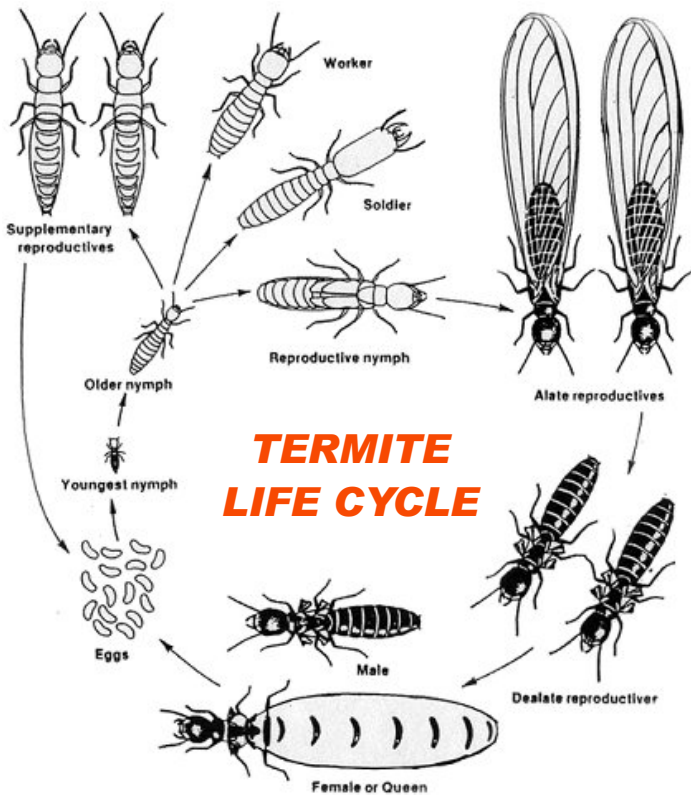
For the past several weeks we have experienced what appear to be subterranean termite swarms throughout the County that have in turn spawned many questions of concern regarding possible infestations. I have heard a quote that “It is not if you will have to deal with termites, it is when.” This is not as much a fearful statement as it is one of keeping a vigilant eye out for this wood-destroying insect pest. Let’s take a look at this insect and highlight what you can do to keep it out of your home.

At this time of year, subterranean termite colonies are sending out their winged reproductives – termite kings and queens – to mate and, if all goes well, set up a new shop somewhere else. These reproductives emerge from a colony, fly, mate and then drop to the ground and shed their

wings. While termites may look a little like flying ants at this stage, careful examination will show you that they have thick waists, straight antennae, and wings that are equal in size. They nest in the soil where they are protected from predators and dehydration. Central to the subterranean termite colony is the queen. She lays the eggs that produce the various members in a colony. A majority of the colony are workers whose job it is to find food. Special soldier termites provide protection for the colony with large wicked-looking jaws. From the colony, workers fan out in search of wood and other cellulose-containing material. With the help of protozoa in their gut, termites are able to digest and use wood as food.

Often damage by subterranean termites is not evident and careful inspection must be employed to detect their presence. However, worker termites can construct mud tubes that extend from the ground to a wooden structure as a safe passageway that protects these industrious, yet frail insects from predators and dehydration. These mud tubes may be seen spanning foundations, where concrete slab floors are cracked, or where

(Continued on page 2)



The use of trade names in this publication is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. UF/IFAS does not guarantee or warranty the products named, and references to them in this publication do not signify our approval to the exclusion of other products of suitable composition.

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) is an Equal Opportunity Institution authorized to provide research, educational information, and other services only to individuals and institutions that function with non-discrimination with respect to race, creed, color, religion, age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, political opinions or affiliations. For more information on obtaining other extension publications, please contact Charlotte County Extension Service at 941.764.4340, or visit us online at <http://charlotte.ifas.ufl.edu>. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Florida, IFAS, Florida A. & M. University Cooperative Extension Program, and Boards of County Commissioners Cooperating.

March 30, 2009

pipes and utilities enter a house. Subterranean termites feed by following the grain of the wood and consuming the softer part of the wood. HOLLOWED OUT GALLERIES can be detected by tapping with a screwdriver handle. You may even find that a screwdriver will break through these hollow areas in the wood.

Prevention is always a smart move to deter termites. Preconstruction treatments, baits, and termiticide barriers are all strategies that can be employed that provide preventative protection. Regular inspections by qualified pest control companies are a good idea for homeowners. Generally, pest control companies offer free in-

spections. Have at least three companies make inspections and if you need to go with one also ask for references, insurance information, and appropriate certifications and licenses. Also make sure that they sit down with you to go over the treatment options and guarantees, supply you with the pesticide labels and if present, show you proof of evidence of active infestations. While swarms of flying termites outside your house do not necessarily mean that your home has an infestation, termites are everywhere and prudent investigation and protective measures will pay off to help keep your home termite-free. For additional details on subterranean termites, become an informed consumer and check out our EDIS fact sheet entitled "Subterranean Termites" by P. G. Koehler and C. L. Tucker located at http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/document_ig097.

Resources:

- Koehler, P.G. & Tucker, C.L. (2003) Subterranean Termites. UF/IFAS Extension Service.

Ralph Mitchell is the Extension Director/Horticulture Agent for Charlotte County UF/IFAS Extension Service. Ralph can be reached at 941.764.4344 or by email: Ralph.Mitchell@CharlotteFL.com.

For more information about our Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Program, please contact our FYN Horticulture Program Assistant, Allison Turner, at 764.4351 or email Allison.Turner@CharlotteFL.com. Allison can help educate you about the FYN Program so you can create a beautiful, Florida-Friendly landscape that saves you time and money while conserving precious water resources and reducing pollution.

*contact a
MASTER GARDENER
on the Plant Lifeline from 1:00pm-
4:00pm Monday, Wednesday, and
Friday at 764.4340 or by email
Master.Gardener@charlottefl.com.*

*You can also visit them at
one of our many **Plant Clinics**
around the county:
<http://charlotte.ifas.ufl.edu/PlantClinics.pdf>*



RALPH MITCHELL
Extension Director/Horticulture Agent
Ralph.Mitchell@CharlotteFL.com

CHARLOTTE COUNTY UF/IFAS EXTENSION SERVICE
25550 Harbor View Road, Suite 3 - Port Charlotte, Florida 33980
941.764.4340 - 941.764.4343 (fax) - <http://charlotte.ifas.ufl.edu>

