

Feeding and Hibernation

Feeding

Freezing before feeding

Insects and arthropods can carry mites, diseases, or parasites that can be harmful to your queen/colony. It is highly recommended to freeze any food for a few hours at least before feeding. Many people store insects in the freezer until it is feeding time. They will last for a long time in there, but like other foods, freezing and thawing repeatedly can cause them to spoil

Feeding live insects that you yourself have raised is acceptable. Flightless fruit flies are commonly dumped into an outworld to let the ants hunt. Store bought insects may carry mites, crickets are well known to carry mites.

Feeding Dishes

Using feeding plates or containers minimizes the cleanup and chances of mold. Feeding plates can be made from anything from tinfoil, pieces of cardboard, or the inserts in some pop bottle lids.

Another alternative is to soak cotton balls in food such as sugar water when offering it to prevent drowning.

Waterers are excellent ways to water, or offer liquid food. Easily made or bought.

They can be bought from tarheelants.com

Link on how to make them: <http://forum.formiculture.com/index.php/topic/108-how-to-build-an-ant-waterer-or-liquid-feeder/>



Offer A Varied Diet

Ants like a varied diet. If you are only giving them crickets day in and day out you may find that don't accept them as easily or at all after a while. This is because, as with all foods, each individual type of arthropod has its own nutritional content and a varied diet gives them more of the nutrients they need.

It is highly recommended to offer your ants a varied and balanced diet for your ant colony. Some good sources of sugar are honey, hummingbird nectar, table sugar, potentially fruits (careful of pesticides), and maple syrup. Many hobbyists offer a mix of hummingbird nectar, maple, and chocolate flavored whey protein. Many ants will accept it.

Tear the body and trim wings

I find it's also a good idea, especially with young colonies, to cut up or tear open any insect prey before feeding. It gives the smaller, weaker nanitic workers an easier way inside to the good stuff. This is especially true for harder bodied insects such as beetles. Trimming off any wings or spindly legs (like those on crane flies) prior to feeding can help prevent a mess in the outworld.

Test tubes/tubing as feeding tubes

Utilizing unused test tubes or lengths of aquarium tubing, you can effectively create a feeding bottle. Simply fill the tube with your liquid food, plug the open ends with cotton, and voila, the ants can drink without drowning, and you don't have to worry about replacing it any time soon unless it molds. If your honey or syrup is too thick to do this with, thinning it out with some water is effective.



Over feeding and under feeding

Be advised that it is possible to over- or under-feed your ants. Over-feeding might give them too much food, which they will store, and it may go moldy in the nest. If the ants remove it, great, but sometimes they don't. Under-feeding isn't generally a huge problem, but if you are under-feeding you may notice your newest workers being smaller than usual. This is because the larvae are underfed, just like the queen's first brood, don't get enough of the stuff they need to grow to normal size.

Underfeeding is usually not a fatal error for your ants, unless you forget to feed them for a month or so. Ants are hardy creatures with rather small stomachs and the ability to store food in their second stomach. Ants are marvelously efficient creatures.

Most ants will collect as much as they need and dump the excess in the outworld.

Note: if the colony has too much room in the nest, they may use a spare chamber as a garbage heap. As the colony grows they will likely empty it out.

Preferred foods

Like people, ants have preferred foods. It varies from species to species, and even season by season or with the stage their brood is in.

Link to a list of preferred foods by species: <http://antfarm.yuku.com/topic/14178/Preferred-foods-by-genus-species#.Urn8oLTwrYR>

Hibernation

In Alberta (and many other locations) we have a winter where there are no ants active in the wild. It is a time when ants rest and re-energize themselves.

Generally, in the wild, a colony will store food, then sometime in the fall or early winter, seal off the nest. No foraging takes place, brood stop developing, the queen stops laying eggs, and everyone seems to go to sleep; but what about in captivity? What happens if you don't let them hibernate? Where can you place them for the winter? What kind of environment do they need?

What about in captivity?

In captivity, the same thing happens as in the wild. It's a natural cycle ants go through whether you hibernate them or not. If you choose to keep them heated and lit up during the winter, you'll likely notice less activity, no or slow brood development, no egg laying, and less foraging. It's probably best for their health if you just let them sleep.

What happens if I don't allow them to hibernate or keep them heated over the winter?

If you don't let them hibernate, then there is a chance they will suffer for it. Some colonies stay perfectly healthy, others start having increased worker deaths, and all around poor colony health. The queen tends to lead a much shorter life without hibernation. It is strongly recommended to let them hibernate for at least 2 months, although 3 months is preferable.

How do I put them into hibernation?

There are several ways to hibernate your ants. They require a temperature between 2-8°C.

An unheated room in a cool basement will work, and many people put their ants in the fridge. Coolers can be used with success, either the electric version or using bottles of ice to keep the

temperature low. It is strongly suggested to place a thermometer on top of the nest to monitor it.

Check them once a week or so to ensure they have adequate water and that they aren't freezing to death, but otherwise leave them alone.

If you have an insulated/heated garage or shed, put a thermometer in it to monitor the temperature over the winter; anything lower than 0°C may be hazardous to their health. The temperature shouldn't get above 8° C

What do I do for them during hibernation?

You should offer some sweets during the hibernation period just in case anyone wakes up and goes foraging. It's not all that common, but not completely unheard of either. The thing you need to be most concerned with is water. If they run out and the nest dries up, they can die very quickly. Make sure they stay moist and have access to water at all times.

Some ants may appear to be dead during hibernation, but they may just be sleeping. If you're concerned, you can remove the ant, warm it up, and check it. If it appears dead, place it on a wet paper towel for a few hours. While it is possible for ants to die during hibernation, I wouldn't really worry myself over it until spring. It can take a day or so for the ant to wake up.