Formica fusca

Silky Ant | Care Sheet

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KEEPING LEVEL	ORIGIN	NEST TEMPERATURE	NEST HUMIDITY	WORKERS BEFORE NEST
Beginner	UK & Europe	20–26°C	50–70%	10+

🐜 At a glance

Also known as	*Serviformica fusca*
Origin	🇬🇧 UK native; found across Europe and northern Asia
Keeping level	Beginner — hardy and fast-growing. No sting; workers can spray a tiny puff of formic acid, harmless to people
Queen	10–12mm, dark brown to black with a silky sheen
Workers	4.5–7mm, one size (no majors), dark brown to black
Colony form	One or a few queens (can be polygynous); most colonies start with a single queen
Founding	Claustral — the queen raises her first workers alone in her chamber
Mature colony	Usually around 500 workers, a few thousand in large colonies
Nest temperature	20–26°C — normal UK room temperature, no heating needed
Nest humidity	50–70%
Workers before moving into a nest	10+
Winter	Hibernation optional — see below

📖 About this species

Fast, alert and always busy, the silky ant is one of the most rewarding UK natives to watch. Workers are large for a British ant, quick on their feet and brilliant hunters — you will see them race out the moment food lands in the outworld. In the wild they nest in soil, under stones and in old tree stumps along woodland edges and hedgerows, and they are the favourite “host” species of the famous slave-maker ant *Formica sanguinea*. Because the workers are fast climbers, a PTFE escape-prevention band around the top inner edge of the outworld lid is essential.

📦 When your ants arrive

- ⚠️ **MOST IMPORTANT:** leave the parcel completely unopened, exactly as it arrived, at room temperature for **5 hours**. The ants must adjust to your home’s temperature gradually — abrupt temperature changes make ants seriously unwell.
- After the 5 hours, check the queen is safe and sound, then leave the colony in its original packaging (test tube still in its tin foil and wrapping) in a quiet spot — in daylight, never direct sunlight — away from vibration and daily household activity.
- 😴 Give the colony **4 to 5 days** of complete rest. The ants were fed before dispatch and need nothing from you during this time. Assemble and water the nest while you wait.
- Still workers or a motionless queen after delivery are almost always delivery stress. Check the antennae: moving antennae means she is fine. Almost all recover within 4 to 5 days (a little longer for bigger queens).
- 👑 A queen on her own: keep her test tube wrapped in its tin foil, undisturbed, and feed her once a week — a tiny drop of protein jelly, about half a grain of rice, on a small flat piece of tin foil placed

inside the tube next to the dry cotton stopper. In our experience a fed queen is stronger and her brood develops about 30% faster.

🏠 Moving into the ant farm

- Keep the colony in its test tube until it has at least 10 workers. Moved earlier, the workers often abandon the queen in the larger space, which can lead to colony failure. A queen bought on her own stays in her test tube until she has 15+ workers.
- Connect the test tube to the nest with the delivery tin foil still on and leave it for 14 days. Then slide the foil back about 1mm every day until the tube is fully exposed to daylight.
- If the ants have not moved in 2 days after the tube is fully exposed, wrap the foil back on, wait another fortnight and repeat the whole process — patience is the key. Moving in happens on the ants' own time: anywhere from a couple of days to 6 months.
- The red filter and black cover stay on the nest at all times — it is pitch dark inside. The black cover can come off once a day for 2 to 3 minutes (ideally at night); the red filter once a week for 2 to 3 minutes.
- ☀️ Place the ant farm in normal daylight, never direct sunlight (the sun can overheat a nest within minutes). Avoid windows, radiators and heaters, vibrating surfaces, speakers and TVs, strong smells such as the kitchen, and busy walkways. Keep a steady room temperature.

🍯 Feeding

- 🍯 Sugars for worker energy: our organic ant honey (lab-tested at 81% carbohydrate) or Best Ants UK Ant Nectar (90% dextrose, an even richer energy source) — never sugar water or home-made mixes.
- 🥩 Protein for the queen and brood: Best Ants UK Protein Jelly or NextSwarm Cricket Mash. Keep protein jelly in the fridge at all times once opened. Silky ants are keen hunters, so growing colonies have a big appetite for protein.
- Feed twice a week, small amounts, in the outworld only. Remove leftovers after 2 days to prevent mould.
- 🦗 Live food (mealworms, crickets, locusts) is only for established colonies, never small ones. All bought live food carries tiny mites that can destroy a colony, so always scald it first: hold it with tweezers in just-boiled water (no longer bubbling) for 10 to 15 seconds, then chop it in half and serve on a small tin foil tray.

💧 Watering the nest

- 💧 Use **distilled or purified water only** — never tap, rainwater or bottled mineral water, even boiled. They carry minerals and microbes that turn a nest green with mould. A litre of distilled water costs a few pounds and lasts over a year.
- Water the nest with the pipette provided: pour slowly, a few drops at a time, through the watering hole, and stop as soon as 1 or 2 drops appear inside the nest — that is how you know it is done correctly. More than that is too much.
- Once a week is usually right — slightly more in summer, less in winter. Never water the outworld.

🌡️ Temperature and winter

- No heating is needed: Formica fusca thrives at normal UK room temperature.
- Hibernation is NOT a must in captivity. At room temperature (17–26°C) the colony simply slows down naturally over winter — development continues at roughly half the summer rate at 20–26°C, and roughly a third at around 15°C. The biological clock cannot be tricked.
- ❄️ Full hibernation (development stops completely) happens at a steady 10°C from roughly 1 December to the end of March, with fresh water only and no food. A steady 10°C is only possible in a specialised hibernation unit or a wine cooler with precise temperature control. If you cannot keep that, do not hibernate — leave the colony at room temperature. Never use a fridge, shed or garage.
- Never hibernate a first-year queen, and always cool down and warm up gradually — never in one step.

⭐ Golden rules | Never break these

- 🚫 Never put ants in a fridge, and never expose them to abrupt temperature changes. Cold does not kill a colony instantly — the ants get sick and die over the following days.
- 🚫 Never use gel ant farms, Ytong or concrete nests, or DIY nests.
- 🚫 Never use tap, rain or mineral water, even boiled.
- 🚫 Never move a colony into a nest too early, and never tip or shake ants out of their tube.
- 🚫 Never disturb the colony with tapping or handling — vibration stresses the queen and she can stop laying or eat her eggs.
- ☀️ Never keep the farm in the dark: ants need daylight for their circadian rhythm. Daylight yes — direct sunlight never.

🛒 Recommended for this species

- Formica fusca queens
- A7 Plus Ant Farm Kit
- PTFE Escape Barrier
- Protein Jelly
- Cricket Mash
- Organic Honey
- Ant Nectar

📚 These care notes cover the essentials only. Please read the full ant farm setup guide and our Formica fusca care guide from A to Z. Questions? Message us through our contact form and we will be happy to help. 💚

Written and reviewed by the Best Ants UK team, keeping ants since 1997.