Pheidole pallidula

Big-Headed Ant | Care Sheet

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KEEPING LEVEL	ORIGIN	NEST TEMPERATURE	NEST HUMIDITY	WORKERS BEFORE NEST
Intermediate	Mediterranean	21–28°C	50–70%	30+

🐜 At a glance

Origin	🌍 Mediterranean, southern Europe
Keeping level	Intermediate — tiny, fast ants that need good escape prevention (PTFE barrier)
Queen	7–8mm, reddish brown
Workers	2–4mm, red-brown
Soldiers	Around 6mm, shiny black with a reddish brown head
Colony form	Several queens possible (polygyne)
Nest temperature	21–28°C — they grow best at 23–25°C
Nest humidity	50–70%
Workers before moving into a nest	30+ minimum, 50+ recommended
Winter	No hibernation — keep above 15°C at all times

📖 About this species

A fascinating Mediterranean species with true soldiers: big-headed majors that crack seeds and defend the colony, while the tiny minor workers race to every crumb of food. The workers are small and quick, so a PTFE escape-prevention band around the top inner edge of the outworld lid is essential. Colonies grow fast once established and have a big appetite — a well-fed colony is a calm colony.

📦 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 30 workers — 50 or more is even better**. Both work, but the bigger the colony, the faster it settles. Moved earlier, the workers often abandon the queen in the larger space, which can lead to colony failure. For this species the same 30+ rule also applies to a queen bought on her own.
- 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.
- 🌾 The soldiers love cracking small seeds such as sesame or millet — offer a few on a small tin foil tray in the outworld, never directly on the substrate, where they can sprout.
- 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

- This is a warmth-loving Mediterranean species: keep it above 15°C at all times, ideally at normal room temperature or slightly warmer. It grows best at 23–25°C.
- No hibernation is needed. Over winter the colony naturally slows down at room temperature — reduce feeding accordingly and keep the nest watered.
- Never use a fridge, shed, garage or any cold spot, and never expose the colony to abrupt temperature changes.

⭐ 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

- Pheidole pallidula colonies
- 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 Pheidole pallidula product page 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.