Camponotus nicobarensis

Asian Carpenter Ant | Care Sheet

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KEEPING LEVEL	ORIGIN	NEST TEMPERATURE	NEST HUMIDITY	WORKERS BEFORE NEST
Beginner	Southern China & Vietnam	26°C (24–27°C)	65–75%	3+ (5+ ideal)

At a glance

Origin	Southern Asia (southern China, Vietnam)
Keeping level	Beginner-friendly exotic — fast-growing, active and forgiving
Queen	15–16mm, red-brown to dark red-brown with a bulky thorax
Workers	6–12mm, red-brown to brown
Colony form	Single queen (monogyne)
Nest temperature	26°C target, safe range 24–27°C for optimal brood development (never below 20°C, even in winter)
Nest humidity	65–75% RH, enough moisture for eggs and larvae without excessive condensation
Outworld humidity	around 50% RH, a standard UK room, keeping rubbish and leftover food dry to prevent mould
Workers before moving into a nest	3+ minimum, 5+ recommended
Winter	No hibernation — see below

About this species

One of the most rewarding exotics: fast, curious and quick to grow — a single queen can build a colony of over a thousand workers within a few years. One thing not to worry about: in our experience most carpenter ant queens eat their eggs during transport. This is completely normal for Camponotus — the queen recycles the protein and lays again within 2 to 3 months of settling in.

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 3 workers — 5 or more is recommended**. Carpenter ant workers are big and capable from the start. A queen bought on her own, with no workers yet, stays in her test tube until she has 15+ workers: a lone founding queen needs a strong workforce before a bigger space.
- 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

- Camponotus love honey — our organic ant honey (lab-tested at 81% carbohydrate) or Best Ants UK Ant Nectar (90% dextrose) is their favourite energy source. Never sugar water.
- Protein for the queen and brood: NextSwarm Cricket Mash is especially efficient for carpenter ants and larger colonies; Best Ants UK Protein Jelly works too. Keep protein jelly in the fridge once opened.
- Large colonies (1,000+ workers) need protein far more often than the standard small-colony schedule, or the brood cannot develop properly — scale feeding up as the colony grows.
- 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.
- If the meter reads above 80–85% and heavy condensation appears on the glass, back off the watering slightly to keep the air moving. To help your ants and lower the nest humidity, remove the stopper from the queen's test tube entrance on the nest and replace it with a cotton ball: this increases the airflow inside the nest, and the cotton absorbs the high humidity faster.

Temperature and winter

- No hibernation — one of the joys of this species.
- In its native southern China and Vietnam the ground nesting temperature never drops below 20°C, so 20°C is the natural floor: never let the nest fall below it, even in winter. In a cold room, keep the nest heated with the Advanced Heating System Small 4W, warming no more than a quarter of the nest on the side opposite the water inlet.
- Aim for 26°C in the nest (safe range 24–27°C) for optimal brood development all year round. Never expose the colony to abrupt temperature changes, and never use a fridge, shed or garage.

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

- Camponotus nicobarensis colonies
- Carpenter Ant Farm Starter Kit
- A7 Plus Ant Farm Kit
- Advanced Heating System 4W
- Cricket Mash
- Organic Honey

These care notes cover the essentials only. Please read the full ant farm setup guide and our Camponotus nicobarensis 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.