Paraponera clavata

Bullet Ant | Care Sheet

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KEEPING LEVEL	ORIGIN	NEST TEMPERATURE	NEST HUMIDITY	WORKERS BEFORE NEST
Expert	Central & South America	24–28°C	60–80%	10+

🐜 At a glance

Origin	🌎 Central and South American rainforests — from Honduras to Bolivia and Brazil
Keeping level	Expert — one of the most painful stings of any insect; adults only
Workers	Over 20mm, black to reddish black, robust and heavily armoured
Colony form	Single queen
Founding	Semi-claustral — the queen hunts for her first brood
Mature colony	Can exceed 2,000 workers
Nest temperature	24–28°C
Nest humidity	60–80%
Workers before moving into a nest	10+
Winter	No hibernation — keep warm all year

📖 About this species

The legendary bullet ant, named for a sting that is said to feel like being shot. In the rainforest, colonies nest at the base of trees and workers forage up into the canopy, bringing back nectar, plant juices and captured insects. They are calm unless disturbed, and watching these giants hunt is unforgettable — but this species is for experienced adult keepers only.

> ⚠️ **Extremely painful sting — adults only. A bullet ant sting causes intense, throbbing pain that can last many hours. Never handle the ants, never open the setup near children, always use long tweezers and keep the lid closed. Anyone with an insect-sting allergy should not keep this species.**

📦 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).
- 👑 Start with a colony, never a lone queen or a single worker: choose at least 10 workers with eggs, larvae or pupae laid inside that colony (not added from elsewhere) — that is your proof of a fertile

egg-layer. The egg-layer often looks almost identical to the workers, so the brood is the only reliable sign for most keepers. The more workers, the better your chance of success.

🏠 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.
- 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

- 🦗 **Live prey is the heart of this species' diet** — it is a true hunter and will not thrive on jelly alone. Offer live crickets or cockroach nymphs (our Red Runner or Dubia Roaches) — 2 to 3 times a week, in the outworld only, sized so a single worker can overpower it.
- 🔍 Buy live food only from a clean, trusted breeder and check it for mites before it goes in — mites can destroy a colony, starting with the queen. Larger prey the ants accept pre-killed (mealworms, crickets, locusts) should be scalded first: hold it with tweezers in just-boiled water (no longer bubbling) for 10 to 15 seconds, chop it in half and serve on a small tin foil tray.
- 🥩 NextSwarm Cricket Mash is a useful protein top-up between hunts. In the wild they collect a lot of nectar, so offer organic honey or Ant Nectar twice a week.
- 🧹 Remove leftovers and uneaten prey after 2 days to prevent mould. A springtail clean-up crew in the outworld helps keep things tidy.

💧 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 hibernation. Paraponera clavata comes from a warm climate and must stay at 24–28°C all year round — in a UK home this means gentle heating in the cooler months.
- Use the Advanced Heating System Small 4W warming no more than a quarter of the nest, on the side opposite the water inlet, so the ants can choose their temperature. For a colony still in its test tube, use the Heating Mat with Thermostat Small 4W and heat only about 25mm of the tube, at the end opposite the water — never lay the whole tube on the mat.
- Never let the colony get cold, and never expose it 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.
- 📟 Choose a nest with a pre-installed humidity and temperature meter (our A5 M PLA or A4-2 Smart Meter) — humidity is impossible to check any other way, and it matters most for these species.
- 🧤 Never handle these ants or let children handle the setup — always use long tweezers and keep the lid closed and the PTFE band fresh.

🛒 Recommended for this species

- Paraponera clavata colony
- A4-2 Smart Meter Ant Farm
- PTFE Escape Barrier
- Advanced Heating System 4W
- Test Tube Heating Mat 4W
- Dubia Roaches
- Red Runner Roaches
- Ant Nectar

📚 These care notes cover the essentials only. Please read the full ant farm setup guide and our Paraponera clavata 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.