Camponotus herculeanus

Hercules Ant | Care Sheet

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KEEPING LEVEL	ORIGIN	NEST TEMPERATURE	NEST HUMIDITY	WORKERS BEFORE NEST
Intermediate	N. & mountain Europe	20–25°C	50–70%	3+ (5+ ideal)

🐜 At a glance

Origin	🌲 Mountain and northern forests of Europe and Asia, also North America
Keeping level	Intermediate — hardy and impressive, needs a natural winter rest. No sting, but majors bite
Queen	Around 15mm — one of Europe's largest ants
Workers	Polymorphic: minors, medias and majors; black head and gaster with a reddish-brown thorax
Colony form	Single queen; large colonies in the wild
Nest temperature	20–25°C
Nest humidity	50–70%
Workers before moving into a nest	3+
Winter	Natural winter rest — see below

📖 About this species

The Hercules ant is a giant of the northern forests, nesting in living and dead conifers, stumps and logs. Strong and impressive, it is built for cold winters, so a natural winter rest suits it best. In our experience most carpenter ant queens eat their eggs during transport: completely normal for Camponotus (and only Camponotus), and the queen 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** — 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.
- 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

- Camponotus herculeanus is a cold-climate carpenter ant, so a winter rest is natural for it. At room temperature (17–26°C) the colony still slows down from around the end of November to the end of February — the biological clock cannot be tricked.
- ❄️ Full hibernation is optional: 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, 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.

🤩 Did you know?

- It is described as the most cold-tolerant ant known — surviving temperatures below −40°C — and lives right up to the Arctic tree line in Norway.
- In European forests its foragers help protect young conifers from the pine weevil.

⭐ 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.
- 🚫 Never release this species into the wild — a colony raised in an ant farm would not survive. If you can no longer keep it, visit our ants adoption page and ask us whether we can adopt it.

🛒 Recommended for this species

- Camponotus herculeanus colonies
- Carpenter Ant Farm Starter Kit
- A4-2 Smart Meter Ant Farm
- A7 Plus Ant Farm Kit
- PTFE Escape Barrier
- Cricket Mash
- Organic Honey

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