Temnothorax nylanderi

Acorn Ant | Care Sheet

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KEEPING LEVEL	ORIGIN	NEST TEMPERATURE	NEST HUMIDITY	WORKERS BEFORE NEST
Beginner	UK & Europe	22–26°C	60–70%	10+

🐜 At a glance

Origin	🇬🇧 UK native; found from Spain to the Caucasus and north to southern Sweden
Keeping level	Beginner — tiny, peaceful and easy. They have a sting, but it is far too small to notice
Queen	3.5–4.7mm, yellow to yellowish-brown with a dark brown gaster
Workers	2.3–3.5mm
Colony form	Single queen (monogyne); usually around 100 workers, up to about 200
Nest temperature	22–26°C
Nest humidity	60–70%
Workers before moving into a nest	10+
Winter	Very cold-hardy; hibernation optional — see below

📖 About this species

A whole colony small enough to live inside an acorn! Acorn ants are gentle, peaceful and avoid conflict with other ants, so keep each colony in its own setup — never in a multi-colony farm. Their small colonies make them perfect for a compact ant farm and for watching every worker up close. Always provide water, plus honey and protein jelly.

📦 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,

with no workers yet, needs a little longer: she 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

- 🔬 Tiny ants need tiny portions: a drop of food the size of half a grain of rice is plenty for the whole colony.
- 🍯 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.
- Feed twice a week, small amounts, in the outworld only. Remove leftovers after 2 days to prevent mould.

💧 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: room temperature suits them all year.
- ❄️ Acorn ants are extremely cold-hardy: in nature they spend the winter in fallen acorns on the ground, through frost. Hibernation is optional — from roughly 1 December to the end of March they can hibernate in an unheated shed or garage here in the UK, even when the temperature drops below 0°C. Fresh water only, no food.
- Never hibernate a first-year queen.

🤩 Did you know?

- In nature colonies live in hollow acorns, twigs and under tree bark — a whole family in a home smaller than your thumb.
- Temnothorax ants are famous in science for "tandem running": an experienced worker leads a nestmate to food step by step, and pairs move faster the further they go.

⭐ Golden rules | Never break these

- 🚫 Never put ants in a fridge, and never expose them to abrupt temperature changes. Acorn ants are the exception for winter cold only: they can hibernate in an unheated shed or garage, but always let them cool down and warm up naturally with the seasons.
- 🚫 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

- Temnothorax nylanderi colonies
- Acorn Ant Farm for Beginners
- PTFE Escape Barrier
- Protein Jelly
- Organic Honey
- Ant Nectar

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