Beginner

Camponotus vicinus

Variable carpenter ant

A hardy carpenter ant from western North America whose colours change from place to place, nesting in soil under stones. A North American ant, not sold by Best Ants UK and possibly illegal or impossible to import to the UK.

ORIGIN
Western North America
SW Canada, western USA, western Mexico; meadows and open forest, under stones

NEST TEMPERATURE
24–28°C
Advanced Heating System Small at 24°C, under a quarter of the nest

OUTWORLD TEMPERATURE
18°C night, up to 28°C day
By day like the nest or a degree or two cooler

HUMIDITY
Nest 50–80%
Outworld about 50%, never watered

WINTER
Rest Oct to Feb at 5–8°C
Only in a hibernation unit with precise control; otherwise room temperature. Never in the first year

MOVE TO A NEST
3+ workers
5+ is better

SIZE
Queen 14–16 mm
Workers 7–13 mm, colours vary from yellow-brown to black

COLONY
One queen
Up to about 3,000 workers over many years

Food

- **Proteins:** Cricket Mash (the more efficient protein for carpenter ants) or Protein Jelly (keep it in the fridge)
- **Carbohydrates:** organic Ant Honey or Ant Nectar, far better than sugar water or home-made mixes

- Twice a week, small amounts, outworld only, on tin foil or a feeding dish; leftovers out after 2 days. Founding queen: a tiny drop of protein jelly on tin foil once a week. Small colonies don't need live insects
- Buy food only from established ant-keeping suppliers: bird seed, dried mealworms and pet-shop live food often carry blood-sucking mites

Water

- Distilled or purified water only, never tap, rain or mineral water, even boiled
- Pipette a few drops at a time through the watering hole and stop when 1 or 2 drops appear inside; water when the meter drops below 50%
- Never open water: a watering test tube in the outworld, never a water dispenser; never water the outworld

Best setup

- Carpenter Ant Farm Starter Kit (nest with humidity and temperature meter) or A7 Plus with its pre-installed digital meter
- Daylight, never direct sunlight; away from windows, radiators, vibration, speakers and kitchens. Test tube warmth: a heating cable at the cotton stopper end only, never a heat mat
- Escape risk: strong climbers. PTFE Fluon band around the top inner edge of the outworld lid, reapplied about every 4 weeks (every 2 weeks for 300+ ants)

Good to know

- Most carpenter queens eat their eggs in transit: normal for Camponotus, she lays again within 2–3 months
- On arrival: parcel unopened for 5 hours, then 4–5 days of complete rest in its packaging
- No sting, but bigger workers can nip and spray formic acid. Never handle them, never a fridge, shed or garage

Read the full care guide | **All our ant care sheets**

Best Ants UK care sheet. These notes cover the essentials only: read the full care guide and our ant farm setup guide from A to Z.