

Visitors eat you out of house and home

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Q: We are building a home in the North Georgia mountains. We have just paid a large sum for termite control. The builder said the soil had to be treated. I have several questions:

- Is this just a good idea or is it mandated by building codes?
- How long will the treatment last?
- Does this mean our house is sitting in a bunch of termite poison?
- Is this harmful to humans?
- Is there something we should do in the way of regular maintenance to protect our home from termites?

— **C. Gleason, e-mail**

A: The Georgia state adopted residential building code requires protection against termites in areas that are "favorable to termite damage." The most common way to prevent a termite infestation is to chemically treat the ground around your house. The chemicals form a barrier of poison in the ground that the termites will not pass through. The chemicals are under your house or in the ground where they are usually not harmful to humans.

Recently, bait systems have become popular. A bait system combines poison with a food source. When the termites eat the food, they spread the poison and either reduce or completely destroy the colony. The bait is placed in containers around your house. The containers are usually about 6 inches in diameter and are green or brown.

Your pest control company checks the bait containers several times a year. You should consult with your pest control professional for the best method of termite treatment for your home. In addition to barrier and bait methods, the best method of termite prevention is a yearly visual inspection of your house by a pest control company.

No matter which prevention method you choose, it will require placing your house under a termite bond. The termite bond works like a warranty from your pest control company. After an initial barrier or bait treatment, your pest control company warrants that they will re-treat for free if your house becomes infested. This is called a re-treatment bond. Although it is becoming rare, some bonds will also require your termite company to repair damage caused by the termites. This is called a repair bond.

WHAT DO TERMITES LOOK LIKE?

There are two types of termites that you may see. The first type is the workers. Workers will be seen in any piece of material that is termite infested. The workers are white and look like small pieces of crawling rice. The second type of termite you may see are the colonizers. The colonizers look like flying ants, but ants have much larger front wings. The colonizers come out of the ground in the spring in a swarm. A swarm of winged termites will include thousands of colonizers.

HOW DO I KNOW IF MY HOUSE HAS TERMITES?

If you see either of the termite types described above, especially the workers, in any part of your house, you may have a termite infestation.

WHAT DO I DO IF I THINK I HAVE TERMITES?

If you think you have termites in your house, you should call a licensed pest control company to perform an inspection. Pest control companies in Georgia are licensed and regulated by the Georgia Department of Agriculture. You should make sure that the company you choose is licensed. Additional information on licensing can be obtained from the Department of Agriculture Web site, www.agr.state.ga.us, or by calling 404-656-3685.

— Bill Garwood

Ask the Inspector: Do you have a home repair question? Send an e-mail to "Ask the Inspector" at H&G@ajc.com.