



ask the landscape professional

Linda K. Lillie of Sprigs & Twigs

Welcome to my weekly series!

Feel free to send me questions you'd like to have me answer and I will do my best to address the ones of most general interest.

Email or mail your questions to: info@sprigsandtwigs.net or
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Question of the Week: *I have a lawn question and bet others have the same thing going on in their yards. We have noticed an incredible amount of ant hills in our yard this summer. When it rains, the ants come out of the ground in droves. The same thing is happening at my mom's house. Is there anything we can do? It's so widespread that I can't imagine it can be treated. What causes this? And should I be worried? - Jane, Mystic*

Linda's Answer: Amazingly, world-wide there are over 12,000 species of ants that have been identified and possibly more than triple that number waiting to be discovered. In Connecticut, ants like to build their nests in dry, sandy soil. The combination of last summer's drought, a fairly dry winter and the dry spring of this year has created outstanding conditions for ants to expand their population and build more underground nests. The soil in our area is incredibly dry, especially down deep where the ant nests are located. But lately, we have been having some heavy rain and ants and heavy rain don't mix. So instead of building their nests deep underground, they build them closer to the surface in order for the nest to dry out faster after it rains.



Ants prefer lawns that are struggling and patchy, so you generally don't see significant ant issues in strong healthy lawns. In any case, ants don't eat grass and generally don't damage a lawn. Ants are actually beneficial because: 1) they aerate the soil (even more than earthworms do) and remove debris from the lawn surface to feed to their young or to use as nesting material, 2) eat harmful lawn and plant insects, and 3) disperse seeds of many plants. Ants themselves are a food source for birds, frogs, toads and beneficial insects. One thing to be aware of is that ants love aphids. Aphids produce a sweet, sticky substance called "honeydew" that ants feed to their young and the queen ant. Ants actually protect or 'tend' the aphids like sheep. Make sure you do not have any plants that attract aphids to your yard. Plants that are struggling or stressed are aphid attractors. Move those plants to better locations, or, in the case of shrubs, prune them to allow for increased air flow. Natural enemies like birds, lady beetles and wasps are the most effective control for aphids.

So, in short, even though ants in your lawn may look a bit unsettling, there is nothing to worry about.

**"Ask the Landscape Professional" articles are all on our website;
if you missed any, go to www.SprigsandTwigs.net**

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The Landscape Professionals

Linda K. Lillie has been President of Sprigs & Twigs, Inc. for the last 19 years. She is a graduate of Connecticut College in Botany, an accredited NOFA Organic Land Care Professional, a Connecticut Master Gardener and a national award winning landscape designer for her design and installation projects..

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