



Easy Steps to Manage Ants Around the Home and Garden

By Suzanne Bontempo of [Plant Harmony](#)

While generally harmless, ants can raise concerns when they move indoors or show up in overwhelming numbers in the garden. While the sight of ants can make some people uneasy, it's important to remember that most ants are not a serious problem—and many are actually beneficial. Ants help aerate the soil, assist in breaking down organic matter, and serve as food for birds, lizards, and other helpful garden creatures. In a healthy garden ecosystem, they often play a positive role. That said, ants can occasionally become a nuisance, especially when associated with pests like aphids or in cases involving aggressive species like fire ants. If you're concerned about ants, there are effective, pollinator-safe strategies you can use—without turning to insecticides. When I'm tackling ants, here are a few simple steps I use to keep ants out of the home and to reduce their activity in the garden. Though I have suggestions for successful management, keep in mind that not all ant species will respond the same way. Reach out to your local Cooperative Extension office to learn more about the ants in your area.

The steps for success are:

- 1) Prevent: I focus on keeping ants from entering areas I don't want them to be, like the home. This means sealing up cracks, gaps, and other potential entry points around doors, windows, and foundations.
- 2) Disrupt: Ants leave behind scent trails for other colony members to follow. Wiping down these trails with soapy water, vinegar, or citrus-based cleaners helps break the path and discourages more ants from following it.
- 3) Monitor: Even after ants are gone, stay alert for new activity. A quick response can stop a new colony before it settles in.

Here's how to apply these steps in the home:

1. Seal up cracks and crevices around countertops, tile, floor base boards, windowsills, door frames, and pipes that run into the home from the exterior with caulk to prevent pests from making their way in.
2. Replace any worn weatherstripping around doors to prevent points of entry.
3. Store food, including pet food and treats, in sealed pest proof containers.
4. Check for leaky pipes or other unexpected water that they may be attracted to and repair those leaks.

**POLLINATOR
PARTNERSHIP**

582 Market Street, Suite 1215
San Francisco, CA 94104



5. Food-grade diatomaceous earth can help control ants, but it should only be used indoors. Avoid applying it where bees or beneficial insects might walk or forage.
6. If ants find their way indoors, use natural trail-disrupting cleaners like vinegar or citrus-based sprays, and seal off entry points. Resist the urge to spray; it only targets ants you can see. A little patience and prevention go a long way!
7. Monitor for new activity.

Here's how to apply these steps in the garden:

1. Pay attention to where the ant activity is. If they're gathering in a dry, uncultivated area like an unused raised bed, neglected potted plant, or pile of rotting wood, begin to water or work that area more often. Ants tend to avoid moist, regularly tended spots.
2. Rinse pests off of plants with water from a hose, encourage beneficial insects (like ladybugs), and improve plant health to reduce infestations. Managing the underlying pest problem will naturally reduce ant activity.
3. Keep garden ants from becoming indoor guests. Trim branches from plants adjacent to the home to prevent ants from using the branch as a ramp for accessing the home. Keep the perimeter of the home or other structures clear from leaf litter and other plant debris.
4. Monitor for new activity.

By taking a prevention-first approach, you can effectively manage ant populations in both the home and the garden—without putting pollinators or other beneficial insects at risk. While it may be tempting to reach for chemical solutions, pesticides rarely address the root cause and can disrupt the broader ecosystem. Long-term success comes from observing ant activity, understanding their seasonal patterns, and addressing the conditions that attract them. Simple, pesticide-free strategies—like sealing entry points, adjusting watering routines, and encouraging natural predators—can make a big difference. What supports a healthy garden also supports pollinators!

**POLLINATOR
PARTNERSHIP**

582 Market Street, Suite 1215
San Francisco, CA 94104