Quick Ant Guide

Field ID Guide to the workers of the most commonly encountered British ants

Over 50 species of ant can be found in Britain. Many of these are scarce or rarely encountered and are not covered by this guide.

Start here
with an ant in a clear pot or tube and examine with a hand lens.
- use a twist of tissue to keep the ant at the end of the tube.

- Petiole
- Post-petiole

Waist 1-segmented (petiole)
Waist 2-segmented (petiole and post-petiole)

Petiole
Antenna

Funiculus

Antenna with last 3 segments as long as the rest of funiculus.

Antenna with last 3 segments shorter than the rest of funiculus.

Formicine ant

Leptothorax acervorum (common) or Temnothorax species.

Myrmica species (some very common)

Tetramorium caespitum (coasts & southern heaths)

Myrmicine ant

Reddish, yellowish or bi-coloured ants, shoulders rounded.

Very small, dark ant with square 'shoulders'.

See over page

NOTE: This guide only includes the most widespread and common species. Correct identification of nearly all species requires microscopic examination of features.
Formicine ant

Large; all workers in a nest greater than 4mm long, some greater than 7mm.

Black ants without any red areas.

Ants with some red areas.

Shining, glossy black ants. Head heart shaped.

Lasius fuliginosus

Lasius flavus (builds earth mounds in grassland)

Clypeus notched, head usually all red.

Lasius niger (common in gardens) or Lasius alienus Lasius platythorax

Small; most workers in a nest less than 4mm long.

Yellow or yellow-brown ants.

Brown or dark-brown ants.

Clypeus NOT notched, head usually part black. Nest a thatched mound.

The wood ants.
Formica aquilonia
Formica lugubris
Formica rufa

Formica fusca & Formica lemani (very common)

Ants matt black or silvery. Head not heart shaped.

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