

Avoid Inviting Termites to 'Dinner' at Your House

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It is the nightmare of many a homeowner: Termites merrily eating away at the family castle.

Termites are Mother Nature's way of recycling dead wood, as well as aerating the soil and increasing its fertility. They are an important food source for other insects, spiders, reptiles, amphibians and birds; they are essential for the wellbeing of the environment.

However, if allowed to feed within the walls of a house, they can turn a small problem into a pain in the neck and a huge dent in the wallet.

“[Termites](#) are everywhere in the soil. They are highly beneficial in the soil habitat. We want them in the soil,” said Brad Kard, structural and urban entomologist with Oklahoma State University's Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources. “We just don't want them chewing on our structures.”

In Oklahoma, March through May serves as swarming months for mature reproductive adult termites that are on a mission to start new colonies in a suitable environment. There are several key points stressed by Kard that homeowners can implement to reduce the chance of termites becoming a problem.

The first rule of termite management is to remove termite food sources around or near the home. This is generally referred to as “sanitation.” “A homeowner should conduct a thorough external and internal inspection

of their home, and if mud tubes are found they should be scraped off walls and siding,” Kard said. “All pieces of wood and wood debris in the planter bed, dead shrubs and any paper or cardboard that may be on the ground near the home should be removed.”

Included in this is firewood, which should not be placed against the house, as well as wood-chip mulch, which also creates a desirable habitat for termites.

Kard, a faculty member in the OSU department of entomology and plant pathology, suggests raking mulch at least six inches away from the exterior walls. In addition, rain gutters should be kept free of debris and water should drain away from the house.

“[Wet soil](#), and water around or under a house, creates conducive conditions for termite survival and proliferation,” he said. “If sanitation and water problems are not first eliminated, then it is nearly impossible to manage and remove termites from a structure.”

Those building a house can eliminate many problems during the construction phase by simply making sure there is no scrap wood lying around the house during and after construction, including grade stakes used during concrete pouring. Also, removing tree stumps up to 75 feet away from the house is recommended.

Kard said all wood-to-soil contact must be eliminated, even if the wood is treated.

Other options for homebuilders are making sure all stem walls are solid; using termite shields or stainless steel mesh on top of the stem wall; using preservative-treated wood; pouring a monolithic slab foundation, so that termites cannot find a hidden way up through cracks in the slab or cold joints; and possibly using post-tension-steel slabs to reduce slab

settling and cracking.

“The general concept is to ‘build out’ termites during the construction process,” Kard said. “By completing these steps, the homeowner has already avoided 90 percent of his or her potential termite problem.”

Provided by Oklahoma State University

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