

Name: _____

Date: _____

ANTS

Did you know that there are thousands of ants all over the world? Just about every type of land has ants. Ants live in colonies. Each colony has a queen. The queen spends her whole life laying eggs. Workers in the colony are the daughters of the queen, and their job is to collect food and feed the colony. The soldiers are large female ants who defend the colony. Male ants have wings, and their only job is to mate with the queen ant. Once they mate, they die.

Ants do some very interesting things in their colonies. Some ants build complicated nests. Other ants collect and store seeds. These ants are harvester ants. Some ants fight and capture slaves. They are vicious warriors. Some ants farm leaves and turn the leaves into fungi for the colony to eat. These are leaf-cutter ants.

Ants can be as small as 2 millimetres and as big as 25 millimetres. Ants are insects, so they have 6 legs and 3 body segments. Their outer body is called an exoskeleton and it is hard, just like your fingernails. Ants can have stingers at the end of their abdomen. Some can inject a poisonous acid from their stinger. Ants can also bite!

After the queen lays her eggs, the colony cares for the ants during the four stages of the ants' life cycle. The unfertilized eggs will be males, while the fertilized eggs will be females. After the egg stage, the larvae develop. Larvae look like worms. They can eat solid food, but have no eyes or legs. The larvae will shed their skin many times, as they grow. When they are big enough, they will spin a cocoon around themselves and pupate. To pupate means to turn into an adult form. The life cycle of an ant last about 6 to 10 weeks. Queens can live up to 15 years, and workers can live to be 7 years old.

Most ant colonies make their home in the soil. The ants dig a series of tunnels and open areas. All of this activity in the soil helps to allow both air and water to penetrate deep into the soil. In fact, in areas without earthworms, ants are the main aerators of soil. Another way that ants help soil is by contributing important nutrients to the soil around their mound. Waste, remains of their food and even dead ants contribute to the soil quality.



1. What are the roles of specific ants in their colony?

- a. Queen _____
- b. Daughters _____
- c. Soldiers _____
- d. Males _____

2. What are two interesting facts you learned about what ants do?

3. What are the stages of an ant's lifecycle?

4. How do ants benefit the soil?

