

## Harvester Ants

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**Description:** Many species of harvester ants are found in the United States, some like the red harvester ant, are native to the desert southwest. They are  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch long, and orange to reddish to dark brown to brownish black. Larvae are white and legless. Winged harvester ants swarm and mate, after which the male soon dies. Females drop their wings and dig burrows to start new colonies. Harvester ants nest deep in the ground, building a mound around the entrance and clearing a three foot (or larger) radius of vegetation from around the nest. Small pebbles are left by worker ants near the entrance.

**Damage/Benefit:** Aggressive in defending their nest, harvester ants bite and sting intruders, including humans. They do not invade homes, but can damage lawns, golf courses, and parks with their nest building. Forage yields in heavily infested crop and range lands are reduced. They are seed eaters, eating the seeds of many weeds. They also eat insects.

**Management:** These ants are generally not considered a problem, unless they build their nest in an undesired location. In fields, regular discing and mowing may eliminate them. Pesticides are available, use them during the hot part of the day when the ants are in their nest. Baits are also effective.

Harvester ants may build a mound around the entrance of their nest, clearing vegetation away from it (right).



Red harvester ants can be aggressive when disturbed and will bite and sting (left).