

Selecting a termite control service

If you suspect your house is infested with termites or if other property in your neighborhood has termites, you may need a professional termite control service.

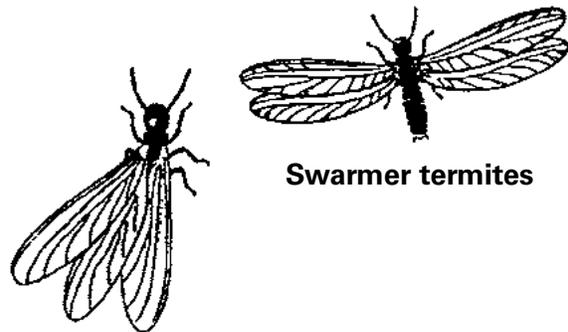
Do-it-yourself termite control is possible using insecticides available at your local garden center or hardware store. Because of the difficulty of doing a thorough job, however, and risks associated with an improper treatment, professional treatment is recommended.

Consider the following points before you make a decision and sign a contract for termite service.

1. Do not panic. Do not be frightened or unduly alarmed. Termites work slowly and your house will not be ruined overnight.
2. Take your time. Do not be rushed or pressured into purchasing termite control service. Take the time to purchase a service wisely and at your convenience.
3. Deal with reliable firms. Shop with the same care that you would use when making other major purchases. Deal with established firms in your area. Check their references and consult the chamber of commerce or Better Business Bureau. All termite control applicators in Iowa must be certified with the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship.
4. Comparison shop. Get several inspections, opinions, and estimates. The termite control business is highly competitive but also highly variable. It is not unusual to receive bids as much as several hundred dollars apart.

Double-check if the prices quoted seem too high, or too low, as either extreme should be reason for concern.

5. Read the written termite control proposal carefully. The proposal should include an inspection report indicating if termites are present and the exact location where they were detected; the name and amount or rate of control chemical (termiticide) to be used; a specific description of the parts of your building to be treated and how they will be treated; a statement explaining follow-up inspection and retreatments (if needed) by the company; and a clear and complete warranty. Also understand what your obligation will be following treatment.



Swarmer termites

6. Watch for scams. Beware of firms that have no listed phone number, offer to trim trees and do other repair work as part of the “deal,” claim to have a secret ingredient, or have excess chemical left over from another job and offer a reduced price if they can treat immediately.

Termite Prevention or Termite Cure?

If termites are found in my neighborhood, should I treat now to prevent termites from getting into my house or should I wait until I have termites and then treat?



Worker termite

There is no one “right” answer for the question of treating to **prevent** termites before they are found versus waiting to cure an infestation **after** termites have attacked. The method of treatment, amount and kind of pesticide used, and methods of application are the same for both

prevention and cure. The major difference between prevention and control is the risk of damage that may occur before the infestation is detected.

It is generally recommended that high risk properties be treated on a preventive basis. These would include properties with known termite presence (e.g., termites in a tree, stump, firewood pile, etc.) or properties adjacent to active termite infestations.

It also is highly recommended that new houses built in high risk situations be “pretreated” for better protection from termite attack. Pretreatment means treating the soil under the structure before cement floors are poured in place. This procedure requires advance communication and cooperation between the contractor or builder and pest control operator.

Houses in low to moderate risk situations can be treated on a preventive basis or the homeowner may choose to wait and watch for signs of termite attack and then treat. If you choose to wait and watch, have a termite inspection done by a professional pest control operator on a regular basis (e.g., yearly).

The reasons you may choose to wait and watch for termite activity include financial considerations, how long you expect to be in the property, and ease of detection. Termites are generally easiest to detect in unfinished basements and in crawl spaces. They are more difficult to locate in finished basements and in slab construction structures.

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Prepared by Donald Lewis, extension entomologist in cooperation with the Iowa Pest Control Association, a statewide trade association dedicated to protecting health, property, and the environment.

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