

# Termites FAQs

Termite biology and necessary control measures are not well understood by homeowners. Here are answers to some common questions asked by homeowners faced with termite problems.

**Q. My next-door neighbor has termites and is going to have his house treated. I've been told that the termites will attack my house next. Should my house also be treated?**

A. Termites move randomly through the soil searching for a source of food (wood). They do not have the ability to know exactly where your house is. So, if your next-door neighbor treats his home for termites, your house does not automatically need to be treated. However, if there are active termite infestations in your neighborhood, it is a good idea to have your home inspected. The construction and condition of a house are major factors in susceptibility to termite infestations.

**Q. I found termites in landscape timbers (firewood and wood mulch) in my yard. Should I have my house treated?**

A. Just because you have termites in your yard does not mean that you need to treat your house. In fact, it makes sense to let the termites feed on the landscape timbers, firewood or wood mulch because they won't be searching for another source of wood. You should; however, move these sources of wood so they are not next to the house or other wood structures. Inspecting your house regularly for signs of termites is also a good idea.

**Q. Can pest control companies always find termite infestations and damage when they do an inspection?**

A. No. Termite infestations are difficult to find if the termites travel vertically through hollow blocks, between the cracks in foundations and behind finished basement walls. Pest control companies cannot be held liable for damage and infestations if they cannot gain access to infested areas. They can be held accountable, however, if they miss an obvious sign of termites.

**Q. Can I do the termite treatment myself?**

A. A person who wants to treat a dwelling for termites needs specialized equipment and training to do it correctly. Such equipment is not readily available and untrained persons may cause more harm than good. For these reasons, it is not recommended that homeowners attempt treatment. They should work with a professional pest control company for this service.

**Q. I've had four companies bid on treating my house for termites. The estimates range from \$300 to \$1500. How do I make a decision about termite control companies?**

A. To make a determination about companies, ask them to write out in detail how they are going to treat your house. If you do not have this information in writing you will not be able to compare companies. In general, the more information a company will give you (in writing), the more confident you can be in the treatment and the company. Beware of companies that will quote you an estimate over the telephone without even inspecting your house or merely give you an estimate on the back of a business card. Ask the pesticide applicator if they have a current Wood Destroying Insect category on their pesticide license. If so, you know that they have taken workshops and have passed a certification test.

To make an assessment of how reasonable estimates are, you should estimate how much the chemical should cost for your dwelling. You will need to know:

1. The outside dimensions of your home. Draw it on graph paper.
2. The distance between ground level and basement footings.

3. The dilution rate (from the insecticide label.) Request insecticide labels from the pest control companies.
4. The application rates (from the label.)
5. Whether you have a block basement foundation.
6. The cost of the chemical. You can get this information from pest control supply companies.

The estimated cost of the chemical should give you an idea of what is a reasonable estimate. In general, if a proper treatment is done, the pest control company will charge somewhat more than the cost of the chemical, depending on labor costs, equipment, insurance, overhead and profit. These labor and other costs will probably be equal or greater than the chemical cost. If bids are less than your estimate the chemical company is using an incorrect dilution or will not apply the material all the way to the bottom of the basement footings. In any case, be suspicious of estimates like this. It does not make sense for a company to lose money on your job.

**Q. What is the best chemical available for termite treatment?**

A. There is not much difference between the effectiveness of termiticides (i.e., insecticides that are registered for termite control) when they are used as directed on the label. The most common reason that a chemical treatment fails is when the application results in an incomplete insecticide barrier around the structure. A few factors that can contribute to a poor treatment are when:

- The insecticide is diluted with too much water,
- The insecticide is not injected to the footings of the basement,
- There is an insufficient volume of insecticide injected; or,
- The soil is frozen or saturated during injection.

Treatment procedures (directions for using the insecticide are found clearly on the insecticide label and should be followed carefully by pest control companies to ensure a proper treatment.)

**Q. If treatment is done correctly, how long will the insecticide barrier be effective?**

A. The termiticides used today for termite control are much less persistent in the environment than chlordane was. With products that are registered today, you should not expect a termite treatment to protect your home for more than five years.

**Q. Will putting this insecticide around my foundation hurt my family or the environment?**

A. We do not know all the answers when it comes to the health effects of insecticides; however, an insecticide must have low mammalian toxicity to be considered for registered as a termiticide. With some of the insecticides, there may be an odor after the treatment that may be offensive to some individuals. Some products are more odor free than others. If you are concerned about odor, mention this to the pest control technician well before the scheduled treatment day.

**Q. The pest control technician told me that for my own safety, I should leave the house during the time it is being treated. Is this necessary?**

A. To ensure that the treatment is being done properly, the homeowner should observe the treatment process. Unless the homeowner is chemically sensitive, there should not be any adverse health problems associated with a treatment done correctly. Ask questions of the pest control technicians. Keep track of how long it takes them to do the job.

**Q. The pest control company will give me a one-year warranty on the treatment. After that I pay \$100 a year for a yearly inspection. If the termites come back, the company will cover the treatment cost. Is this a good deal?**

A. The limited warranties offered by pest control companies are more like buying termite control insurance than a warranty. Whether or not it is a good deal is relative and depends on the level of risk a homeowner wants to assume. In the event of a termite reinfestation, will all costs be covered by the warranties? What will the homeowner have to pay? Can the company increase the yearly inspection fee? Be sure to read the fine print carefully and ask questions.

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