



UNIVERSITY OF
FLORIDA

RF028

EXTENSION

Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences

2002 Florida Citrus Pest Management Guide: Eastern Subterranean Termite¹

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The Eastern Subterranean Termite (*Reticulitermes flavipes*) is a native inhabitant of forests throughout the Eastern U.S. where it plays a major role in the decomposition cycle of wood into soil. Subterranean termites feed on seasoned wood, especially pines, and are major pests of wooden structures throughout their range. Only rarely do they attack living trees. This habit is poorly documented in the literature. Nevertheless, they can become serious pests of citrus in groves where pine woods had supported large termite populations. They persist on buried remnants of the original wood but will also girdle and kill young citrus. Populations in groves have been estimated at 5 million individuals and may range over thousands of square yards. Termites are most prone to attack citrus in the summer when rising water tables force them to abandon other food sources, but attack may occur in any season. Attack commences below the soil line and thus may escape detection until tree death. The termites chew away bark and cambium, generally above the scaffold roots and down to bare wood, encircling the trunk. Lesions are characteristically clean and free of gumming. Feeding may advance above the soil line below the bark, in covered galleries, or under tree wraps. Rapid

tree decline once girdling is 90% or more complete is characterized by shock bloom, interveinal chlorosis, loss of foliage and death. Attack is usually limited to trees 5 or fewer inches in diameter.

Control consists in avoiding the problem, first by meticulous removal of wood residues from new grove sites, and then by creating physical or chemical barriers around trees. Eventually, the problem usually subsides due to tree growth beyond the susceptible stage and/or natural attrition of the colony through lack of sufficient food supply. Baiting methods are now being tested and may soon be available to the grower. Meanwhile, the following recommended practices can be employed to avoid most losses:

1. Remove as much wood as possible when preparing a new grove site, particularly on pine land.
2. Scout suspected infested areas by looking for signs of girdling and inspecting tree crowns below the soil line for lesions and termite activity.

1. This document is Fact Sheet RF-CG028, part of the 2002 Florida Citrus Pest Management Guide, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Date printed: December 1995. Date revised: October 2001. For a copy of this handbook, request information on its purchase at your county extension office. Please visit the EDIS Web site at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.

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3. Do not use tree wraps in infested areas.
4. Wash soil from crowns exposing scaffold roots to discourage termites from preferred attack site.
5. Create a chemical barrier directly around tree crown, preferably with a granular insecticide. This practice will give a maximum of 3 months protection.

Recommended Chemical Controls

READ THE LABEL. See Table 1.

Table 1. Recommended Chemical Controls for Termites

Pesticide	Mature Trees Rate/Acre¹	Comments	Other Pests Controlled
Lorsban 15 G	6.7 lb	Usually only a problem on young trees. Directed application to base of tree.	Fire ants
Lorsban 4 E	5 pt		
¹ Lower rates may be used on smaller trees. Do not use less than minimum label rate.			