



**Sub-family:** Dolichoderinae

**Genus:** Linepithema

**Species:** *Linepithema humile*



### Distribution

In the United States, Argentine ants are found primarily in the south-eastern states and in California, mostly in urban and suburban areas, and in irrigated farming areas.

### Habitat

These ants prefer temperate areas with year-round moisture. They live under rocks, pavement, logs, and refuse or in cracks in the soil.

### Appearance

Small worker ants are dark brown and about 1/8" long. Males are shiny, brownish black, and somewhat larger, with wings. Queens are large and brown with darker abdomens – they may possess wings or wing pods.

### Diet

Argentine ants are omnivorous. Approximately 70% of their food comes from honeydew producers, such as aphids and scale insects, which are "farmed" and protected by the ants.

### Longevity

Males live a few weeks, workers from 6-9 months, and queens up to 7 years.

### Reproduction and Development

In the United States, this species has the unusual strategy of reproducing by "budding." In their natural range, males and females from many different colonies fly to find one another and mate. This strategy encourages genetic diversity.

However, in the United States, a single colony produces many queens that lose their wings upon hatching. Some remain unmated and simply function as workers, but others are fertilized by males within the colony and ultimately start a new colony that is genetically similar to the original.

### Threat to California Diversity

In California, Argentine ants are considered an extremely serious pest. It is thought that the initial colonies arrived in Louisiana in the 1890s on ships carrying coffee and sugar from Argentina. These colonies spread across the southern coastal states and into California.

In Argentina, native ant colonies are territorial and aggressive toward one another. DNA tests have shown that the ants in Argentina are twice as genetically diverse as the ants in California. In California, individuals from a San Diego colony will be welcomed by a colony in San Francisco, presumably because the low genetic diversity among the U.S. colonies allows individuals to recognize each other as members of a single colony.

Normally, a lack of genetic diversity is seen as a disadvantage to evolutionary success, and in fact may be a drawback to the Argentine ant in the long term. However, for the immediate future, this invasive species is dominating many native ants that are several times its size, because its sheer numbers and aggressive behaviors overcome opponents. This domination has proven catastrophic not only to other ant species, but also to more unexpected victims. For example, California horned lizards, which feed almost exclusively on Harvester ants, are in serious decline because their favored prey is being decimated by the Argentine ant.