

Formosan Subterranean Termite

Scientific name:

Coptotermes formosanus

Place of origin: East Asia

Body: segmented, 3 body parts

Length: 2-3 mm

Hair: none

Eyes: blind

Color: pale white

Food: cellulose, plant material

Shelter: underground, in the soil

Lifestyle: social insects

Colony size: 2-10 million

Where do they live?

Subterranean termites live in the ground, unlike drywood termites, which live inside the wood they eat. The ground provides the moisture needed by the subterranean termites. When they find a food source above ground, they build a safe pathway or “mud tube” to create a connection from their home to the food.

What do they eat?

Termites feed on cellulose found in wood, paper, cardboard, and other plant material.

How do they eat wood?

Termites are unable to digest cellulose on their own, so they have friendly inhabitants helping them. There are symbiotic protozoa or microorganisms found inside the termite gut that help termites digest cellulose.

What are social insects?

Unlike solitary insects, social insects develop organized societies where individuals perform specialized tasks for the benefit of the colony. This specialization is the result of individual colony members differentiating into specific *castes*, each of which has unique duties and responsibilities within the colony.

What are the castes?

Reproductives: The king and queen are responsible for laying eggs. They are the parents of the entire colony.

Soldiers: Protectors of the colony. They have large mouthparts that allow them to fight, but they are unable to feed themselves.

Workers: Responsible for building tunnels and nests. They also tend to the eggs and young. Their primary duty is to forage and feed all the other termites within the colony.

Alates: Winged termites that swarm primarily during the summer months. These termites leave the colony, form a mating pair, drop their wings, find a suitable shelter, and establish a new colony. Their primary purpose is dispersal.