White Footed-Ant Attraction to Citrus Trees
March 22, 2008

**Question:** We recently purchased a home in south Fort Myers which came with a lemon and an orange tree. We just contacted a pest control company for a quote on an overall pest management program. They have indicated that we need to include the trees in the program due to the "white-footed ant" problem in the area. We would have to pay an additional $100 a year. At this point we are inclined to simply cut down the trees and avoid the increased cost. We have no strong ties to either tree. Can you give us your thoughts and possible alternative treatments?
- Lorrie R., South Fort Myers

**Answer:** White footed-ants (WFA) feed on sweets; sugar in homes, nectar from trees, and honeydew from sap sucking insects. The WFA can be a major nuisance in houses. On the other hand, the WFA causes no damage to citrus trees and there have been no reports of WFA colonizing citrus groves. The WFA is not the only ant that feeds on honeydew. Ironically if found on citrus trees, it may also be a pollinator as it does what bees do, nosh on flower nectar. However, since they might be a bridge to the house caution is warranted. Yet, to simply treat for WFA on citrus without having a positive identification is throwing away money. It could also upset the natural host-predator equilibrium on the tree. All plants can tolerate some pest abuse as it is part of the natural world. The WFA is a sophisticated nest builder with 8,000 to 3,000,000 ants in a colony. Effective treatment is done using baits. No liquid insecticides have yet been found to be effective for controlling these ants. Thus, spraying the trees to control the ants would have minimum effect on their population. The WFA does not bite or sting, nor has it been reported to cause any structural damage. Go to the UF/IFAS publication at [http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/IN551](http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/IN551) for more information.
March 29, 2008

**Question:** After reading your response to a question posed by a reader about the white footed ant (WFA) I wanted to clarify something for you. The big thing to remember with WFA is that they are arboreal nesters. This means our technicians have to be specially trained to search them out. Many times they are in the boots of a palm tree or the crotch of an oak. There are a number of insecticides on the market that when used properly can control WFA. In fact we have eliminated nests within an attic simply by treating the exterior surface of the structure and trailing ants.

- Larue Pest Management

**Answer:** WFA build their nests above ground. A colony consists of many satellites that are not physically connected. Ants may nest on the crotch of trees, on leaf blades and at the base of palm leaves. They can be very active on citrus trees, and other vegetation, around buildings. They will often forage from the trees into homes. Consequently, pest control that is done for the homes should also include infested trees in close proximity to the house. If a pest control operator needs to use more product than he usually uses, he could be justified in charging for the extra product and labor.

Stephen Brown is a horticulture agent with the Lee County Extension Service. Submit questions by calling the horticulture desk at 533-7504 between 9 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. or by e-mailing brownsh@leegov.com. Visit his web page at [http://lee.ifas.ufl.edu/hort/GardenHome.shtml](http://lee.ifas.ufl.edu/hort/GardenHome.shtml) “Garden Doctor” video clips [http://lee.ifas.ufl.edu/Hort/Video.shtml](http://lee.ifas.ufl.edu/Hort/Video.shtml) and flowering trees information at [http://lee.ifas.ufl.edu/Hort/GardenPubsA_Z.shtml](http://lee.ifas.ufl.edu/Hort/GardenPubsA_Z.shtml)