

Termite Swarms Spell End to Dry Season

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*El Niño – when will this drought
ever end?*

*When the termites swarm in the
evening sky,*

This dryness will come to an end.

The effects of El Niño on Guam and throughout Micronesia have been evident during these past six months with very little precipitation. Many people ask, when will the rains begin? It is suggested to watch for the termite swarms, which will appear in the early evening sky, circling around street or house lights. In fact, over the past few weeks, termite swarms have been the prelude to the initial rains that have started to replenish the needed moisture for Guam's plants and lawns. In years past, when mass numbers of termite swarms appeared, the true rainy season would soon follow.

Termite swarms normally occur after sunset on warm, humid, calm evenings. Dampness, in the form of rain, is necessary for survival of most termites; the best time to start a new colony is just prior to the onset of the rainy season.

When a termite colony wants to expand its boundaries, the queen reproduces thousands of termites that eventually develop wings and are able to fly out of the mother colony. Winged termites (swarmer) are both male and female and their nuptial flight on those warm,



humid, calm evenings is in fact the courtship between the sexes.

Guam has two major types of termites: those who build their nests below ground (subterranean termites) and search for food above ground, and those that only nest and feed above ground (dry wood termites).

Subterranean termites construct “mud tubes” which arise from the ground to above surfaces allowing the workers to exploit and readily consume lumber and other wood

by-products. These mud tubes provide subterranean termites productive highways from their nests below ground and protection from predatory ants and other termites.

Dry wood termites, on the other hand, do not produce mud tubes, for their moisture requirement is almost nil. Dry wood termite presence is usually marked by their fecal droppings, which are those tiny sand-like particles that appear in small piles underneath the wooden structure they are consuming. By far, subterranean termites cause most structural damage on Guam.

Helping You Avoid Termites

How can one reduce the risk of termites invading the home? The following tips have been adapted from J. Tenorio and G. Nishita's What's Bugging Me.

- If you see termites beginning to swarm, turn off inside and outside lights to avoid attracting them to your area.
- If you see termites swarming inside your house, find out how they are getting in and make sure repairs are completed as soon as possible.
- Do not plant vegetation close to the base of the house. Plants near the house provide moisture and food for termites.
- Avoid having any wooden parts of the house come in contact with the ground. This provides direct access for termites into the structure.
- Keep wood, building materials, firewood, stumps, plant materials, and other such materials away from the house.
- Patch or repair cracks in concrete. These cracks give termites access to your house.
- Repair leaking pipes and faucets. These can keep soil under your house continually moist and invites termites.
- Do not install sprinklers too close to the outside walls.
- Water from gutters, drains, and air conditioner hoses need to be carried away from the house to reduce moisture buildup.
- Avoid backfill with wood debris. Wood is a major source of food.
- Improper soil grade can be a potential problem; water should be properly drained away from the house.
- Work with a contractor or pest control operator who is aware of termite prevention and control.

This factsheet was part of a series on household insects written for the Pacific Daily News from September 1997 - November 1999. Content has been verified as of January 2017.