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the sidebar below.

How To Make a Boric-Acid Ant Bait

Commercially formulated boric-acid baits such as Drax[®], which is made of mint jelly and boric acid, have recently become available for use against the pavement ant, thief ant, pharaoh ant and little black ant. They are sold under various labels, and all essentially consist of boric acid plus a sugary attractant. So far, we have had very mixed results using these formulations in field trials with Argentine ants, the principal pest ant in California and other western states. Apparently the ants are not sufficiently attracted to the jelly, although the commercial baits may be very effective against the ant species listed on their labels. We still prefer to make our own bait.

1. Mix 3 cups of water with 1 cup of sugar and 4 teaspoons of boric acid or borax. For the boric-acid component you can use one of the commercially available mixes already prepared for cockroach control. If sugary solutions don't attract your ants, try high-protein foods such as canned cat food.

(Note: The trick is to use enough boric acid to eliminate the ant colony but not so much that the first ants to try the mixture are killed before they pass it on to other members of the colony. If many ants die in or around the bait station, the bait is too strong; if they keep coming in undiminished numbers for more than a week, it is too weak.)

2. Pour 1 cup of bait into each of three to six small screw-top jars.

3. Loosely pack cotton wool to half the depth of the container, then saturate it with the bait solution.

4. Screw the lids on tightly, sealing them with adhesive tape.

5. Pierce the center of the lid with two or three small holes.

Caution: Label the containers with a skull and crossbones. Baited solution should be kept away from youngsters and pets.

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