

Q. I have what seems to be thousands of winged insects coming out of the soil in my front yard. They are about ¼” long, and are massing on the sidewalk. Are these termites?

A. Termites and Ants will ‘swarm.’ This is when insects in the reproductive caste leave the colony to mate. There are some relatively simple ways to tell if you have termites or ants swarming. Catch several of the flying insects, which is easier to do if they are just emerging from the soil. Put them in a small glass jar and freeze them for several hours. This will make them easier to handle. Using a hand lens, a microscope, or your eyes if you have excellent vision, and determine how many body parts are visible. Termites have two body parts, a head and a body. Ant bodies are divided into a thorax and an abdomen, separated by a tiny waist. Termites do not have waists. The antennae are also diagnostic. Termite antennae are relatively straight, while ant antennae have a distinct bend. If you have ants, check out the ant ID site at UC Davis – <http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/TOOLS/ANTKEY/>

One fascinating fact about ant swarms is that they tend to occur simultaneously, giving the reproductives time to find each other. If you have termites, don’t panic. Call a reputable termite inspection company and have your home checked out. Very few of the winged reproductives survive. Most become dinner for someone along the way, but a few may survive to mate and start new colonies. The best source for local termite information can be found at <http://www.cnr.berkeley.edu/lewis/>. The URL for the UCIPM pest note on termites is <http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn7415.html>

