

GET OUT!
Kids' Club

Ant Farming

All Ages

Ants can be a great source of entertainment and learning. They are everywhere and easy to watch. Much like honeybees, ants are social insects and live in colonies. Unlike bees, much of the action happens on the ground right in front of us. Adopting an ant colony lets you have a pet without the long-term commitment or allergies!

No Fuss, No Muss Ant Farm

Leave the ants where they are and visit daily to 'tend' to the ants. Find a nearby anthill and adopt it as you farm. Where to look? Pavement ants live under pavement and leave a telltale pile of dirt at the entrance. (Use sidewalk chalk to mark your farm.) Some ants, in open areas build a nest in a clump of grass, and others build a mound from forest debris, especially pine needles. Mark your farms with a stick or rock so you can find it again. (Choose black ants, avoid red ants which can sting.) Visit your farm regularly and study how the ants move about. Offer small amounts of different foods, fruit, bread, flowers, seeds. Use your ant journal to record the action. See page 2 for more suggestions.



Homemade Ant Farm (This option does disrupt nature. Be sure to take good care of the ants and return them to the same place you found them when you are done.)

Collect supplies as below. Bring the * items with you while you look for your ants. Find an ant colony—ants living under flat rocks exposed to the warm sun are the easiest to collect (learn more on page 2). Peek under rocks until you find a colony. Leave the rock in place while you prepare your farm.



Supplies:

- * 2 clean jars, 1 large and 1 small jar and lid that will fit inside the large jar.
- * Clear plastic wrap, elastic band
- * Large spoon for dirt
- * Small spoon for scooping ants
- ◇ A cloth or construction paper
- ◇ Moist cotton swab, tiny bits of sugary treats



Steps:

1. Place the small, sealed jar inside the large jar. Keep it centred.
2. Spoon soil from the area near the colony into the large jar. Loosely fill the space between the jars. Keep the lid of the small jar exposed and the soil at least 5 cm below the rim of large jar.
3. Lift the rock, exposing the ants and eggs. Gently scoop 20 to 25 ants into the large jar. Carefully scoop 5 or 6 eggs into your ant farm jar. Cover opening with plastic wrap and secure with the jar ring or elastic band. Use a pin to make very tiny air holes so the ants can breathe.
4. Gently carry your ant farm home. Ants are fragile, do not shake your farm.



Care and Feeding: (Remember you are responsible for living creatures now. Take good care of your ants.)

- ◆ Keep your farm at normal room temperature, away from chilly air conditioners and away from sunny windows that can over heat the farm.

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Care and Feeding—continued

- ◇ Ants feel safe and work in the dark, so keep the jar covered with a cloth or heavy paper when you are not watching the ants.
- ◇ Every few days place a damp cotton swab (for water) and food, bits of banana, apple, or grape, tiny cookie bits or cake, dandelion flowers, etc. on the lid of the small jar. Ants love sugary stuff!
- ◇ Return your ants to where you found them, their real home, after 3 to 4 weeks. Gently remove the small jar and carefully pour the contents of the large jar next to the original colony. The ants will find their way home. Leave a treat to thank the ants for helping you learn about them. (Ants do love a good picnic!)



Ant Antics to watch for:

- ◆ Spot an ant ‘house cleaning’, carry debris out of the hill/nest.
- ◆ How many ants go in or out of their nest in 1 minute?
- ◆ Watch an ant carrying an insect, plant material, or another ant.
- ◆ Spot an ant carrying something larger than itself. (Ants can carry 20x their body weight)
- ◆ Watch two ants working together to move something.
- ◆ Ants leave a scent trail to find their way back to good food. Spot an ant following a trail. (Hint – ants ‘sniff’ with their antennae)
- ◆ Place a drop of honey 20–30 cm from an ant nest. How long does it take for an ant to find it? How soon do other ants following the “trail” to the honey? How long before the honey is gone?
- ◆ Watch for ants weather-proofing, covering the openings with pine needles or small stones. (Check the weather forecast for rain!)
- ◆ Follow one ant as it heads out foraging.
- ◆ Watch ants meeting and greeting each other with antennae touching.

True Ant Farm— Ants are farmers. Some species grow edible fungus inside their nests while others look after tiny ‘livestock’. The latter live close to colonies of aphids, tiny insects that suck the nutritious juices from plants. The ants protect the aphids from predators. In exchange for protection, the aphids give the ants honeydew, a nourishing, sugary liquid. An ant ‘milks’ the aphid by gently tapping it with its antennae or front leg. When the aphid feels the tapping, it secretes (pees) honeydew for the ant to collect. The ant moves from aphid to aphid, gathering ‘pay for protection’ and takes it home to the colony. This ‘I help you, you help me’ relationship is called symbiosis.



An ant is protecting its ‘herd’ from hungry ladybug larvae.

Look for aphids, tiny green or black insects, clustered on tender new plant stems. See if you can find tiny farmers at work!

Hot Rock Heating — Garden ants build nests underground beneath a heat-absorbing object, usually a flat rock. During the day, they bring their eggs and pupae up under the warm rock to help them develop faster. A fast-growing colony has advantages in the competitive world of ants. The radiant heat from the rock also allows the garden ants get an early start in the spring and keep going longer into the fall. Ants have used ‘radiators’ for heat long before people thought to.

Carefully turn rocks until you find a nest. Watch the ants take care to save every egg, pupae, and each other. Time the activity to see how long it takes. Remember to gently replace their rock. (Be sure to give a little space while watching — Ants will defend their home and they can bite.)



Ant tunnels and chambers under a rock

How to make a simple, pocket-sized Farm Journal.

- * Cut the page in half along the solid line.
- * Put the top half on top of the bottom half, and fold along the dotted line to form a booklet.
- * Add as many inside pages as you like. Use blank paper, lined paper or a combination of both.
- * Punch two holes on the fold using a hole punch.
- * Bind the pages together with round-head brass fasteners or ribbon. Add more pages as needed.

2021 - GET OUT! Kids' Club
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Antics on the Ant Farm

By _____