Subterranean Termites
Richard M. Houseman

**Identification**: These are termites in the family Rhinotermidae. The most common subterranean termite infesting homes in Missouri is *Reticulitermes flavipes*, the eastern subterranean termite. They are social insects, living in colonies. There are three castes: reproductives, workers, and soldiers. Termites have bead-like antennae. The swarmers have a pair of equally-sized wings that are as long as their bodies. The wings break off after swarming. The abdomen is broadly joined at the thorax. The winged adults are nearly black and about 3/8 inch long. The soldiers are wingless with white bodies, large rectangular brown heads with large mandibles.

**Life Cycle and Habits**: Termites live in the soil and in dead wood that is in contact with the soil. They are very sensitive to drying out and the soil provides them with the moisture that is necessary for them to survive. They are social insects, with a queen, king, soldiers and workers within a colony. All of the individuals in the colony have a function. Queens and kings have darkened bodies and produce new offspring. The workers have soft, cream-colored bodies and are responsible for nest maintenance and rearing young workers. The soldiers are like the workers, except their heads are enlarged, hardened, and darkened with large mandibles to aid in protecting the colony. Each year, new queens and kings develop wings and leave their old colony by the thousands to found new colonies in the soil.

**Damage**: Subterranean termites are important in natural ecosystems, but can cause significant damage when they invade wooden structures. You should contact several licensed pest control companies in your area to solicit bids for the control of termites if they have infested your home.

**Control Measures**: Contact a reputable pest management professional for control. Do-it-yourself treatments are not recommended. You can request a fact sheet that provides tips on choosing a company.
**Tips For Choosing A Pest Management Company**

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Always deal with a qualified and licensed pest management company that is a member of national, state or local pest management associations.

A federal law requires commercial applicators of “restricted use” products to be certified. The certification program is left up to the state. Homeowners can call the Missouri Department of Agriculture for information: (573) 751-9198.

Ask friends and neighbors to recommend companies they have used successfully and how satisfied they were with the service.

Check prospective choices with the local Better Business Bureau for a reliability report or to see if complaints have been filed against the company you have in mind.

Be wary of the person who comes to your home uninvited and offers to give your house a free inspection for pests. He or she may try to scare you into authorizing immediate and costly treatments.

If a sizable amount of money is involved, get bids from several pest management firms.

Don’t rush a decision. Since you are paying for professional knowledge as well as skillful application of pesticides, look for someone whose judgment you can trust.

Before signing a contract, be sure to fully understand the nature of the pest to be exterminated, the extent of the infestation, and the work necessary to solve the problem.

Find out if the company has liability insurance to cover any damages to your house or furnishings during treatment.

If a guarantee is given, know what it covers, how long it lasts, what you must do to keep it in force, and what kind of continuing prevention and management are necessary.

Buy value, not price. Beware of bargains that sound too good to be true.