

## CONTROL OF THE TEXAS LEAF-CUTTING ANT

By

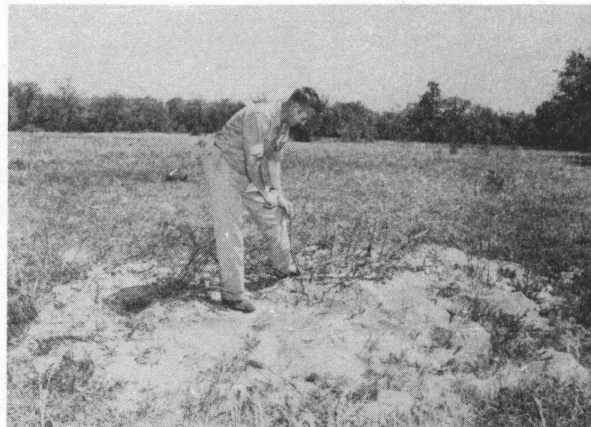
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The Texas leaf-cutting ant, *Atta texana* Buckley, is a serious agricultural pest of southern and eastern Texas and central Louisiana. It causes serious damage to field crops, truck gardens, fruit and shade trees, and pine seedlings in reforestation areas.

**Description, Life History and Habits:** The leaf-cutting ant is rusty-brown in color and at least two of the castes commonly seen have short, stout spines protruding from the large, clumsy-appearing head. Since there are several castes to be found in each colony the ants vary considerably in size. The queens are the largest group and are one-half to three-fourths inches long, with long brownish wings. The soldiers are next in size but are smaller than the queens and have strong, well-developed jaws. The workers are slightly smaller than the soldiers and are commonly seen traveling along the forage trails carrying leaf particles. The smallest ants in the colony are seldom seen outside, their duty being to care for the fungus gardens and probably to feed the young.

The colony is most active from May to September but may remain active throughout the year. The mating flights usually occur in May and the eggs laid by the queens hatch during most of the year. Most of the ants are concentrated in the central colony during the winter and very early spring. It is during this period that control measures are most effective.

A colony generally consists of numerous mounds 12 to 14 inches in height and other openings from which the workers' forage may be found from a few yards to over 300 yards away from the central colony. The central colony contains several large, hemispherical chambers into which the workers bring the leaf particles. In the chambers the leaf particles are further reduced in size and placed in a bed on which a fungus is grown. It is this fungus garden which furnishes food for the ants.



*The methyl bromide is released through a rubber hose into the ant colony.*

Leaf-cutting ants prefer a loose sandy or sandy loam soil but are sometimes found in the heavier soils.

**Control:** Methyl bromide has proved to be the most efficient material found for controlling the leaf-cutting ant. The liquid chemical is packaged and sold in one-pound cans. A special band-type applicator is necessary for the introduction of the liquid into the hole. A rubber tube three to four feet long should be firmly attached to the applicator. This tube is thrust six to twelve inches into one of the openings near the center of the colony and held in place with the foot while the can is opened. The liquid methyl bromide changes to a gas immediately when the can is punctured and, being heavier than air, flows to the bottom of the chamber.

Since all of the ants are concentrated near the center of the colony during the late winter and early spring, treatment should be made during February and March.

**Caution:** Avoid spilling methyl bromide on the skin or inhaling its vapors as it is poisonous.

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