

# Ant Care Sheet



**Species:** *Myrmica rubra*

Common name: European Fire ant

Colony form: Polygyne (multiple Queens)

Sizes -

Workers: 4-6mm

Queen: 5-7.5 mm

## Information:

*Myrmica rubra* are quite a common British ant species. They can be kept at room temperature, when kept in captivity. *Myrmica rubra* have a potent sting so they are able to defend their colony against predators. Their sting is compared to that of a stinging nettle and the effect can last for some time.

*Myrmica rubra* are commonly found to have multiple Queens but since the Queens are only larger than a worker by a small amount, noticing them can prove difficult. *Myrmica rubra* are red/brown in colour and can be found nesting in rotten wood logs in the wild. *Myrmica rubra* are strong hunters and can be very aggressive towards other insects. *Myrmica rubra* are known for being able to kill insects with ease. Just drop a waxworm into a group of 100 or so workers and see their amazing aggressive behaviour.

Mating flights are generally large in summertime and many Queens go and found successful colonies in groups. *Myrmica rubra* hibernate through the winter and wake from hibernation around late March. Hibernation can be achieved by reducing the temperature of the nest to around 10 degrees Celsius.

## Feeding:

*Myrmica rubra* will accept insects as their general intake but they can be given honey-water as a sugary supplement to their diet. Regular protein for the development of the brood should also be given in the form of live/dead insects or meat such as cooked chicken. It is generally said that giving live food to small colonies of ants is not the wisest of moves as they will be unlikely to kill it. Mealworms are commonly given as a source of protein. You can buy live mealworms and when you want to feed the colony, you select a young mealworm with a soft outer shell and dip it into hot/boiling water to kill it. After this, you can place the mealworm for the ants to eat. Dipping the mealworm in boiling water ensures that it dies and that any nasty microbes are killed too. Along with mealworms, the following insects are suitable: bluebottle flies, fruit flies, spiders, wasps, bees, moths, crickets, locusts, waxworm, beetles, other ant species and many more!

## Formicarium Choices

When it comes to choosing a formicarium for *Myrmica rubra* you need to take into account that they need a well hydrated nest and humidity needs to be high too.

- Ytong nests

Ytong nests are a type of aerated concrete block which can be carved manually or by machinery to produce interesting patterns. They are very efficient because you can control moisture content by filling water troughs to the desired level and the clear acrylic cover allows excellent viewing of the ants. They are available in many different sizes and have intriguing chamber designs. You can also

have all-in-one Ytong nests which include a foraging area on the top of the nest. This is a good choice for people who love watching their ants work and a good choice for *Myrmica rubra*. You can hydrate the nests regularly by filling the water troughs. A small, low powered heat mat can also be used to humidify the nest but not make it too hot.

- Soil/Sand-loam nests

Soil nest set-ups are also used as a natural type of formicarium as it allows the ants to dig their own nests. Soil nests are available as slim-line versions which consist of two glass panels which are sealed and have a gap in between in which you can fill with soil or a sand-loam mix. Tanks are often used too as they provide a big space for ant colonies to grow and the space above the soil can be used as a foraging area. This is a good formicarium which has the ability to replicate outdoor environments well. *Myrmica rubra* will live happily in a soil nest setup and you can hydrate the nest by spraying regularly with warm water.

### **Beginner notes:**

- *Myrmica rubra* have a sting so be careful to avoid getting stung (it can be painful).
- Try not to disturb a young colony/Queen with vibrations such as tapping on the formicarium or excessive handling of the test tube that the colony resides in. This will stress the Queen out and she will cease to lay eggs for sometime or begin eating her own eggs which is not ideal.
- *Myrmica rubra* like to live in the dark so keeping the nest dark is a good idea. Covering the nest with red acetate allows you to see the ants and the red colour cannot be distinguished by the ants, so they perceive it to be dark.
- With a generous amount of protein in the form of insects and sugary liquids now and again, *Myrmica rubra* colonies will thrive.