

# Ant Care Sheet



## **Species:** *Lasius niger*

Common name: Common black garden ant

Colony form: Monogyne (single Queen)

Sizes -

Workers: 3-5 mm

Queen: 6-9 mm

## **Information:**

*Lasius niger* are very commonly found in the UK and are a very robust species. Queens of this species are monogyne which means that there is only ever a single Queen in the colony. *Lasius niger* dominate a lot of the UK and are a very beginner-friendly species. Their nests are usually constructed underground and under stone slabs. The newly mated Queen will begin her life by digging a hole in the soft soil. After the Queen has dug herself a chamber in the ground she begins to lay tiny eggs. These eggs then develop through the larvae and pupae stage. *Lasius niger* larvae spin themselves a cocoon from in which they pupate rather than there being naked pupae. In the summer, brood is brought up nearer to the surface, underneath stone slabs, to increase the rate of development.

*Lasius niger* do well at room temperature when kept in captivity but brood development can be sped up slightly by adding a small heat mat to raise the temperature to about 23-25 degrees Celsius. In doing so, the metabolic rate of the ants increases.

Mating flights are usually large and prolific in summertime and many Queens go and found colonies. *Lasius niger* 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 but not any lower than this.

## **Feeding:**

*Lasius niger* will accept a variety of food when kept in captivity. Sugar water and honey is always a favourite and will also eat fruits such as apple slices and pears. Basically, anything sweet is suitable for *Lasius niger* to eat. Ant jellies/jams are commonly available as a sugary supplement for ants.

In addition to sweet foods which provide instant energy for the ants, they require protein for the development of the brood. Protein can be given in live/dead insect form or even 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 is fully dead and that any nasty microbes are killed. Along with mealworms, the following insects are suitable for a colony of *Lasius niger*: bluebottle flies, fruit flies, spiders, wasps, bees, moths, crickets, locusts, waxworm, beetles, other ant species and many more!

All in one food supplements are also available for ants to eat. Some people like to buy ant jellies which consist of sweet sugars and protein, all in one convenient jelly.

## Formicarium Choices

When it comes to choosing a formicarium for *Lasius niger* you can choose pretty much any type of nest for them. The list below tells you the two most popular types of formicariums for *Lasius niger*.

- 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. The Ytong is white in colour which really helps to make *Lasius niger* ants stand out. This is a good choice for people who love watching their ants work and an excellent choice for *Lasius niger*.

- Soil/Sand-loam nests

Soil nest set-ups are commonly 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.

## Beginner notes:

- *Lasius niger* are probably one of the easiest ant species to keep and are very hardy so don't worry too much about them as long as they have access to water and a steady supply of food, they will flourish and grow into a large colony.
- Try not to disturb the ants 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 could result in death as the most serious consequence.
- *Lasius niger* 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.