
ANT STARTER SET INSTRUCTIONS

Box Contents:

1 x Glass vertical ant habitat 30 x 20 x 1.8cm
1 x Glass feeding tank 30 x 20 x 20cm
1 x Glass and aluminium feeding tank cover (high-grade steel mesh)
1 x 50cm flexible tubing 10/14
1 x Tubing connector
1 x Rubber plug 6-10mm
1 x Rubber plug 9-13mm
1 x 1kg sand/loam mixture
1 x 50g Clay granules
1 x Feeding/water dish 30mm
1 x Stainless steel tweezers
1 x Plastic pipette
1 x Wide water tube (drainage)
1 x Narrow Water tube (drainage)

Instructions:

Begin by checking the contents of the kit against the list above. Read through the instructions before starting the setup.

Step 1)

Take the **vertical glass ant habitat** and place the **wide water tube** in the bottom, lying in flat.

Cover this tube with **half** of the **clay granules**.

This creates a small water reservoir underneath the colony which will prevent both over-watering and drying out of the nest. Water can be added to the nest in the future by inserting the **narrow water tube** down into the soil and using the **pipette** to add water directly to the reservoir.

Step 2)

Ensure the **sand loam mixture** is damp by adding a small amount of water. The **sand loam mixture** can then be placed into the vertical ant habitat on top of the clay granules.

Step 3)

Connect the **vertical ant habitat** and the **feeding tank** using the **flexible tubing**.

To do this remove the **tubing connector** from the end of **flexible tube**, insert the end of the tube through one of the holes in the **feeding tank** and re-attach the **connector** to the end of the tube which is now inside the **feeding tank**. The tubing attaches to the **vertical ant habitat** by simply being pushed on.

The **rubber bungs** can now be inserted into the remaining openings, one in the **feeding tank** and one in the **vertical ant habitat**. These holes are there so additional habitats can be connected as the colony grows.

Step 4)

The remaining **clay granules** can be added to the feeding tank for decorative purposes along with the **feeding and water dishes**.

Step 5)

If you have purchased a colony remove the bung and place the test tube into the feeding tank.

You may need to provide a small twig to allow the ants to reach the connecting tube. Over time they will move from the feeding tank up to the nest tank.

Additional Notes:

If you are introducing a very young colony to a habitat it is suggested that a piece of cling film is placed across the top of the feeding tank and the lid is rested on top. This does two things: It helps with humidity which is always important with young colonies. And as the first batch of workers produced by a queen are always much smaller, usually 1/3 or 1/4 of normal size, it will prevent them squeezing through the mesh. Once the colony has grown a little the workers will be larger and the film can be removed.

The First Year of an Ant Colony

Almost all ant colonies begin in summer when the annual mating flights take place. Winged queens fly, mate, remove their wings, and search for a place to make their nest.

The lone queen digs or find a small hole to start her nest. For safety she seals herself in the small tunnel (similar in size to a test tube) and lays her first batch of eggs where she cares for them. The eggs develop to larvae, then pupae and eventually into adult worker ants.

The time taken for an egg to become an adult ant is 5 - 7 weeks, depending on temperature and time of year.

- Egg to larvae - 10 - 12 days
- Larvae to pupa - 10 - 15 days
- Pupa to adult ant - 10 - 25 days

These first workers are always much smaller, usually $\frac{1}{3}$ or $\frac{1}{4}$ normal size. As the colony grows and is able to collect food the workers produced are larger.

Food should be added, a small amount at a time and making sure there is variety. Sugars and honey are used by ants for energy and proteins (from insects or protein jellies) for the development of the larvae. Colonies of only 10 workers will only need a tiny dab of sugar honey or other food every 2 or so days.

Colonies develop slowly and steadily in their first few months and by Autumn the colony should have increased to between 5 and 15 workers before preparing to enter their first hibernation.

Colonies should be hibernated over the winter just like they would experience in the wild. To hibernate the colony move the tank to a cool place (around 5C) such as a garage, shed or outbuilding in late October. But it must be somewhere they won't freeze.

The colony can then be brought back indoors in mid to late March the following spring. A small amount of food should be put in the nest if there are warm winter days where the ants become active and they should be well fed prior to hibernation.

Once the colonies leave hibernation they will also need to be well fed and should be in a position to grow quickly. From March to June the colony should double in size from colonies of 5 to 15 workers increasing to colonies of 10 – 30 workers.

Once they reach around 25 workers they are the perfect size to leave their tube and move into their starter set. If the conditions in their tube are better than in the nest area they won't leave the tube. You shouldn't force them to leave as this will cause them stress and disruption. It is better to slightly adjust the conditions of the nest area until they are ready to move.

Once a colony has reached a year old it is much more likely to succeed in becoming a large colony and from that point will grow at a fast rate. Queens usually live for around 10 years, but can live much longer than this.