



## Learn about Ants

There are over 10,000 different species of ants on our planet, with a variety of sizes, shapes, colors, environments, and roles within our ecosystems.

### When you see an ant...

The ants you see are most always worker ants. They are female ants, but they do not lay eggs in this role. Worker ants can go out to find food ("foraging"), fight to protect their territory (known as "battles"), protect their nest (as "soldiers"), care for their young, or tend to their nest (such as by farming other animals like aphids, making and cleaning tunnels, etc.).

If you want to identify the species of ant, it is helpful to be familiar with some basic ant anatomy, which can even give you hints about the job of this worker ant. Ant bodies are divided into three main segments: the head, the thorax, and the abdomen, in that order. On the ant's head, you can find the ant's two antennae, the mouth parts ("mandibles"), and the eyes. The thorax is where all six legs attach. Finally, you'll see the abdomen. Often, there are one or two bumps between the thorax and abdomen ("petioles") that can help to distinguish different species.

Ants eat a variety of foods, depending on the species and environment. Ants are omnivores, eating both plants and animals. Some ants hunt for other animals such as bugs, some prey on already dead larger animals, and some eat more plant products. Ants also like to eat sweet things, in

nature and in your kitchen. In all of these cases, worker ants find food and bring it back to the nest to share.

### An ant's community...

Ants are social animals that live in communities called colonies. A colony can be made up of hundreds to thousands of ants!

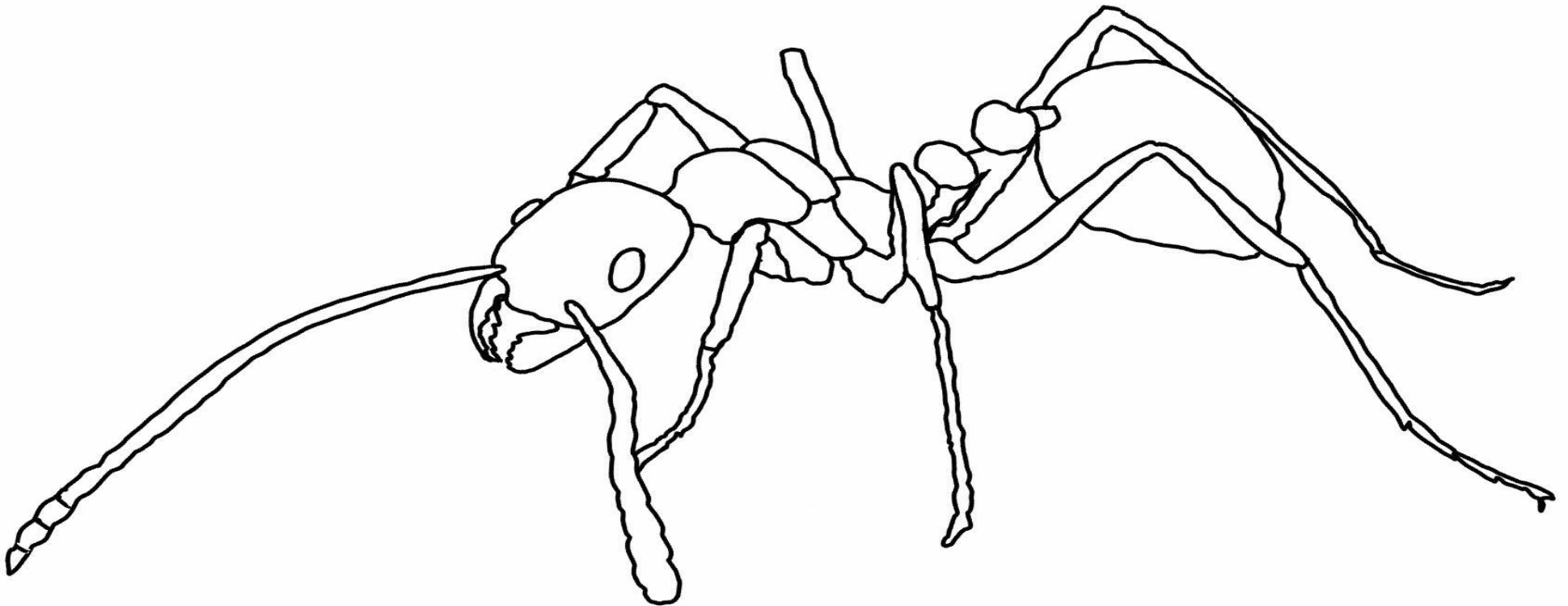
Most of these ants are workers. Workers can vary from each other by size and shape depending on the job they perform and can be referred to as minor, major, or supermajor based on their relative size.

A colony typically has one or more queen ants, which have significantly larger bodies (thorax & abdomen). Queens can have wings, though they often fall off after the queen begins to lay eggs. Queens mate with male ants, which also have wings as they have flown away from other nests where they were born. A colony without a queen will often collapse.

With so many species of ants, there are also exceptions!

Illustrations by [Kristin Reiber Harris](#) with inspiration from the [Kronauer Laboratory](#) at Rockefeller University, [Alexander Wild](#), and [Ant Wiki](#).







**Word list:** abdomen, antennae, eye, head, leg, mandibles, petioles, thorax

