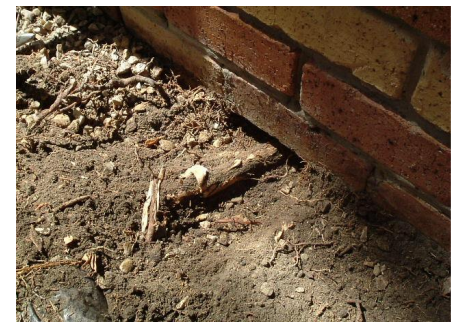
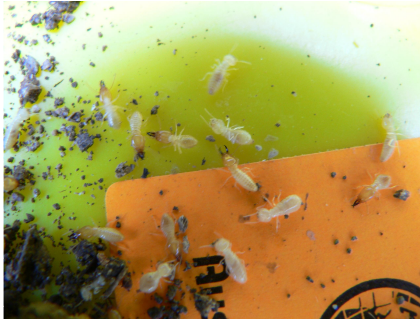


Termite Inspection for Home Owners

A Complete Do It Yourself Manual For Beginners



by Jerry Funnell

Includes hundreds of photos taken from actual termite inspections
clearly illustrating all you need to know.

Termite Inspection for Home Owners.

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Preface:

There are many books and scientific journals about termites, but there is very little useful information available to the general public. The question that professional pest controllers get asked time and again is **“How do I know if I’ve got termites?”** The standard reply is “The only way to find out is to get a professional termite inspection.” That may be true, but for most people that answer leaves them feeling pretty helpless and in many cases, frustrated.

This manual has been specifically written and designed to teach the reader how to inspect their home and yard for termites themselves and do it responsibly with a conscientious approach.

The author, Jerry Furnell has been actively involved in the pest and termite industry since 1989. During this period, he has conducted hundreds of termite inspections and he draws on this vast experience to bring you this manual.

It was first published over an 8-month period during 2005 in the Greenpest News and was a very popular series with many readers. At the time it only contained a handful of images. Much has been added since the original writing including 196 images and about 4,000 extra words. The original text is no longer available online.

It is the aim of this manual to fill the void of information and reveal the methods and secrets that most professionals use when they inspect your home for termites. However, a manual cannot pass on ‘experience’ or the ‘instinct’ that a good termite inspector develops with years of practice.

This manual will definitely help steer the inexperienced home owner in the right direction. Not only will it provide lots of valuable information and explain how to look for termites, but it will also provide the reader with many simple ideas that can be implemented to reduce the risk of termites getting in their home in the first place.

All of the photos in the manual have been taken ‘on the job’ by the author and are included so that you can more easily identify potential problems or termite activity around your home. Every effort has been made to keep the terminology simple.

It’s strongly suggested that the manual be read from cover to cover first before beginning to implement any of the instructions contained within.

Jerry Furnell is also the inventor of the Green Termite Bait System™ as well as the Ec2c Termite Window®. He is a prolific writer on the subject of termites and is the author of the Greenpest Newsletter that goes out every month by email to hundreds of subscribers across Australia and the world. If you are not already a subscriber please visit www.greenpest.com.au where you can subscribe for free and also find previous newsletters archived for your further education.

Important Notice and Warning:

In this manual, you'll be shown some useful methods that you can use to find and locate termites in and around your home. Firstly, a word of warning. They say that a little knowledge can be dangerous. You wouldn't get on a plane if you knew that the pilot's only experience was that he had read a manual on how to fly an aeroplane. Likewise it is still strongly advised that you have a professional termite inspector check your home at least once a year for termites.

The purpose of the information and techniques that are shared with you in this manual is simply to make it much easier for you to identify termites in the early stages of their activity before they have an opportunity to do significant amounts of damage to your property. Some will think that by having this manual they can do away with the professional termite inspector. You do so at your peril.

It is hoped that by reading this manual you will have a better understanding of termites and that you can save yourself from potentially expensive termite damage. It's aimed to teach the reader to find and recognise termite activity in its early stages.

The Australian Standards suggest that every home owner should have their home inspected by a professional **at least once a year**. That is sound advice.

This manual is intended to help the reader learn what to do **between** annual professional inspections.

Many times throughout this manual you will read – **“If you find termites or evidence of termites, contact your local professional pest controller.”** This really is important. Find yourself a good pestie who knows what he's doing and use him when you need him. It is foolish and risky to try to control termites inside your house yourself. This manual is written in layman's language and designed to help you to find termites in and around your property (if they are there). It's not the intention or purpose of this manual to encourage you to try to *treat* the termites yourself. Treatment is specialist work, and even experts struggle at times to achieve a satisfactory result. For this reason, you will not find recommendations or instructions on how to carry out actual treatments.

This manual has been written in good faith with the best of intentions; however, the author accepts no responsibility for the misuse of the manual or for any damage, repairs or injuries that may arise as a result of reading this manual or following the directions given in the manual.

A special thanks to John Fleming who contributed his time to help proof read and advise on the final draft. His 30 years experience in the industry and solid knowledge of timber pests helped to ensure the accuracy of the information provided.

Okay, that said let's get on with it.

Introduction.

Before you begin it's best if you know what a termite looks like. If you have never seen one, here are a few pics to help.



Coptotermes spp. soldier.



A group of *Coptotermes spp.* soldiers vigilantly defending their entry point in a besser block wall after the plaster was removed to expose them.



Termites and black ants together. You will see that termites have a head and a body, two segments; whilst ants have three segments including the thorax that links their head to their body. Termite workers are creamy colour or white (hence the Australian colloquialism ‘white ants’), but termites are not ants. Termite soldiers tend to be darker than workers, even deep brown with some species. Workers have see-through bodies and may be darker if they are eating a dark coloured timber... you can actually see inside their gut.



Small *Schedorhinotermes* spp. soldiers with hundreds of fat juicy workers. Notice their dark guts.



Workers and soldiers – *Coptotermes* spp.



You won't find or see this girl too often – she's the Queen.



Schedorhinotermes spp. soldiers in a gap between two bricks on the outside wall of a brick clad timber frame home. This entry point was located 30cm below ground level.

Quick tip: If you find termites and want to have them identified, collect a few soldiers and send them to Green Termite Bait Systems. Just catch them with a bit of sticky tape then stick them to a piece of paper with your name address and phone number.

Please state the location the termites were found. Include photos of the termite activity if you have any. You'll be advised which species they are and whether or not they are high or low risk to your home.

Chapter One

The Donger

First you are going to need a donger. They are expensive to buy and the professional one is not as good as the home made one we are about to show you how to make for yourself. It's one of the simplest and most useful tools that a pest controller uses to find termites. It's very easy to make one of these for yourself, and best of all it's a fraction of the cost of a professional one. Simply go to your nearest hardware or cleaning supplies store and purchase a cobweb removal brush. These usually come with an extendable handle that you will also find very useful later on. You are looking for a brush with a plastic head and nylon bristles. Now remove the bristles from the head of the brush one clump at a time. You may want to use it to clear some cobwebs first!



Grab the bristles with a pair of pliers and rotate the pliers to remove them.

You now have a fantastic donger with an extendable handle which is great for reaching the beams in cathedral ceilings as well as other hard to reach places such as a difficult to reach roof truss that you might suspect has termites. You also just saved \$50 buying a professional one!

Beginning at your front door, walk around your house in an anti-clockwise direction (if you are right-handed) and tap on all the skirting boards, window and door frames, exposed beams and any other timber that is accessible.



You only need to tap lightly. You should try to make each tap about 50mm apart. It takes a little practice and you will soon get into a rhythm. Try to balance the donger so that the swing becomes rhythmic.

Although you are using your eyes to see where you're going and where you're tapping, it is really your ears that are doing the hard work. You are listening for two different sounds.

First, you are listening for any differences in sound from one tap to the next in the piece of timber that you are checking. You don't need to try too hard. In fact, if you are tapping along a skirting board and you go from a piece of solid skirting board to a piece of chewed out skirting board the difference in sound is obvious.



You can see the skirting board in this picture is rippled and hollow. That's because it **is** hollow and sounds hollow when you tap it.

If you do find a hollowed out piece of timber, do not break it open to take a look!



DON'T DO THIS!

Instead, press it softly with your fingers to see if there is any give in it. If it is soft, it may be termites. Don't panic. Now, call your local pest control expert and have them come and determine if it is termite activity, or borer activity, or simply fungal decay. If it is termite activity, he will also determine whether it is still active or inactive with termites.



Can you see the ripples in the paint in this door frame?

Please remember that termites are very shy and if you disturb them, they may abandon their workings. Consequently you could lose an excellent opportunity to effectively treat them. It's harder and more expensive to treat termites if they have left the scene of their crime. Once again for emphasis, if you find termites, please **do not disturb them**.

Okay, it's likely that despite the admonition to contact a termite professional, some readers will still want to look inside the area of suspected termite activity for themselves. We understand that for many people the urge is irresistible, especially if it is the first discovery of termites in the house. So if you truly want to take a peek, then do it the correct way.

Use a sharp thin non-flexible knife blade with a pointed tip such as a penknife, and insert it carefully into the weak section of wood making a 4cm slit. Gently prise the hole open being careful not to 'pop' it. Using a bright focusable torch, take a quick peek and check for any sign of termites or movement. If there are only low levels of activity, you may need to take several looks before you'll see anything.

If you do spot termite activity, quickly seal off the slit you have made in the wood with some duct tape. Duct tape is preferable to masking tape because duct tape keeps out the light. Now call a professional to come and confirm your findings and prepare a quote to solve your termite problem.



You can see the slit that was made in this hollow section of window frame. Active termites were noted inside the timber.

Another check you can do is to sight along your walls and look for any unusual bulges in the plaster. A bulge may indicate a termite nest.

It's also a good idea to tap the plaster between the studs. You may hear one of two things.

1. A sound of something falling down.
2. A dull thud instead of a hollow knock.

In the first instance, you may have loosened up a small section of dried up termite nest or galleries that have fallen because of the vibration. That was the case in the following photo on the next page.

In the second instance, you may have found a termite nest behind the plaster as shown in the second picture on page 13.

To tap a wall more firmly use the donger like a spear and thump it against the wall.

Not too hard!

Beware that loose wall hangings might fall down!



This nest was inactive at the time of discovery.

It was one of two sub-nests in this particular house. The other sub-nest had been treated several months earlier and it is considered that the treatment at the time also carried across to this as yet undetected termite nest.

Not all the noises of dirt falling in a wall are necessarily the sound of old dried up termite activity.

It is often only cockroach or rodent droppings that you are hearing.

This is more common in older style homes with timber walls



This picture shows the original nest that was treated in an adjacent bathroom.



The owner of this home ripped open this wall (wrong thing to do!) after finding termites in the skirting board. The plaster covering the termite leads had been soft to the touch.

Another thing you are listening for when you are tapping is the sound of termites chattering back to you. Not all termite species chatter when they are disturbed but some do. If you tap on an area of termite activity and the termites are disturbed, they might warn each other by vibrating their bodies against the timber. The sound is faintly audible if you listen carefully and the room is quiet. It's about the same audio level as that of a bowl of rice bubbles popping after the milk's been added. Describing the sound is difficult, however if you can imagine that it sounds like the faint crinkling of cellophane, you're close.

It is often reported that if termites are active in your bedroom walls, you will hear them when it is very quiet during the night. Termites work 24 hours a day. However, you will also hear mice in the dead of night. Mice will sound a little bit different. Unlike cellophane, mice sound more like a scratching noise similar to scratching your fingernails against the wall.

If you started at your front door, then you will have completed the sound testing of your timber trim and other timbers once you have returned to the door. Did you miss anything?

Checklist:

- ✓ All skirting boards.
- ✓ All timber trim around windows and doors. Did you tap both sides of the doorframes?
- ✓ Exposed beams – cathedral ceilings, under floor bearers, internal posts.
- ✓ Timber walls, timber floors, timber ceilings.
- ✓ Any other timber features.
- ✓ Plaster sheeting.
- ✓ Did you pull out beds and other moveable furniture to gain access to as many areas as possible?
- ✓ Did you empty the bottom shelves of crowded closets so you could tap the timber hidden away at the back?

If you have been moving furniture and emptying closets then leave them that way so you can carryout the next few checks as follows in Chapters 2-4.

Tip: Just because termites are currently inactive doesn't mean you should ignore the problem. They may still be active nearby and return at a later date. If inactive termites are discovered then appropriate steps should be taken to inhibit them from returning. You should consider installing a treated zone at the suspected entry point or a Green Termite Bait System to round them up and eliminate them on the outside.

Pest controllers are often called out to treat mice in a wall only to discover that the noise isn't mice but termites.

Both rodents and termites can do serious damage to your home, so if you do hear any unexplained noises in your walls call your pestie to come and investigate.

- your walls as you go.
- Be enough to find termites, don't disturb them. Termites themselves.
- Call a professional.
-
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This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the page. There is no handwriting or other markings on the paper.