

Pogonomyrmex barbatus

(Smith, 1858)

Red harvester ant

A big red seed harvester of southwestern deserts and grasslands, with a painful sting and colonies that live for 20 to 30 years.



Photo: Jake Nitta (froggy143), CC BY 4.0

At a glance



NEST TEMPERATURE
26–32 °C

In the nest



NEST HUMIDITY
50–70 %

Seed granaries: 30–50 %



HIBERNATION
12–16 °C

Dec – Feb



NUPTIAL FLIGHTS
Jun – Sep

After rain, Hot days, Calm weather



WORKERS
6–10 mm

All the same size



QUEEN
11–13 mm

One queen



COLONY SIZE
Reaches 10,000 workers

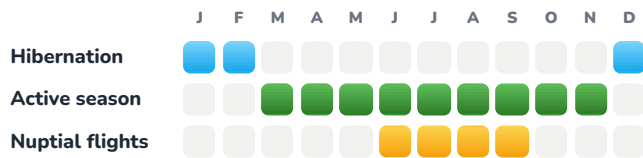
Growth: Moderate



ESCAPE RISK
Medium

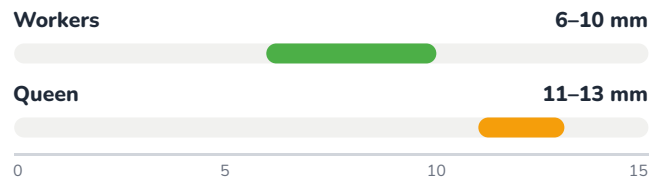
Keep an escape barrier on the outworld

Year at a glance



Months in the native range of the species. The weather decides the exact days, and colonies kept indoors can follow a different rhythm.

Sizes on the same scale



Care at a glance

FOOD

Seeds

Insects

Sugar

BEST NESTS

1. Naturalistic setup
2. Ytong nest
3. Acrylic nest

WHY THIS RATING

- ✓ Fully claustral: the queen needs no food until her first workers arrive
- ✓ Stores seeds, so a missed feeding is not a problem
- ⚠ Curious workers: keep an escape barrier on the outworld
- ⚠ Needs a humidity gradient, with dry granaries and humid brood chambers
- ⚠ Colonies get huge and need room to expand
- ⚠ The workers can sting

Notes from keepers

TIP

Heat is what makes them grow. Keep the warm end of the nest at about 30 °C with a heat cable or mat and let the rest stay cooler. Sellers report that brood develops much more slowly below about 24 °C and that colonies barely grow at plain room temperature.

WATCH OUT

Honey water alone is not enough. One keeper fed eight young colonies only honey water and watched their brood shrink, and was told to leave out crushed seeds and give insects two to three times a week. Offer small seeds such as Kentucky bluegrass, dandelion or chia, and remove any that sprout or turn moldy.