

# Ant Care Sheet



**Species:** *Formica fusca*

Common name: Slave ant/Helper ant

Colony form: Polygyne (multiple Queens)

Sizes -

Workers: 4-8 mm

Queen: 12 mm

## Information:

*Formica fusca* are known as '**Slave ants**' or '**Helper ants**' and are commonly found in Europe.

*Formica fusca* are shiny grey/black in colour and are larger than the **Common Black** ant *Lasius niger*.

They are fast moving and take a variety of insects as food. *Formica fusca*, like other *Formica* species, can spray **Formic acid** from the end of their gasters. The use of **Formic acid** is not common but when under threat they are able to release this acid. *Formica fusca* commonly nest underground and sometimes in stone walls. They are commonly found in the UK and Europe.

Mating flights are big in summertime and many Queens go and found successful colonies. *Formica fusca* hibernate through the winter and wake from hibernation around late March. Hibernation can be achieved by reducing the temperature of the nest to around 8 degrees Celsius but not any lower than this.

## Feeding:

*Formica fusca* will accept different types of food, the main source being insects. They also like sugary foods such as apple slices and honey water.

Regular protein for the development of the brood should also be given in the form of live/dead insects or 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 *Formica fusca*:: bluebottle flies, fruit flies, spiders, wasps, bees, moths, crickets, locusts, waxworm, beetles, other ant species and many more!

## Formicarium Choices

When it comes to choosing a formicarium for *Formica fusca* you need to take into account that nest movements should be kept to a minimum because the ants will not hesitate to use their formic acid and could kill themselves in the nest if disturbed too often.

- 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 *Formica fusca* ants stand out. This is a good choice for people who love watching their ants work and visibility is really good.

- Soil/Sand-loam nests

Soil nest set-ups are also 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. *Formica fusca* do very well in soil/sand-loam nests

### **Beginner notes:**

- *Formica fusca* are quite an easy species to keep and when provided with lots of protein, they will flourish.
- Try not to disturb a young colony/Queen 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 she will cease to lay eggs for sometime or begin eating her own eggs which is not ideal.
- Make sure to avoid getting any formic acid into your eyes as it can be very irritating.