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because we love ants

HOA ant farm “Ocean Grove”

manual

The big and heavy ant farm *"Ocean Grove"* (w=27cm, h=16cm, d=17cm, ~3kg) is an excellent all-in-one solution, designed for medium- to large-sized ground-dwelling ants. It includes everything you need to keep ants successfully (optional tool set and 5W heat pad available). A great choice for starting out as a hobbyist and a perfect gift for young and old.

All HOA ant farms are carefully handmade with great attention to detail. The nest chambers are created to have a natural look. Therefore, each farm is unique and small variations are normal. The farm is designed to reduce the likelihood of mistakes (without complex or space-consuming constructions) based on our knowledge and experience. It's not only made to look good and to perfectly show the ants, it's also made so ants will feel good living in it.

material list:

- container with nest body (incl. 2 sideward connecting holes with plugs)
- lid with ventilation holes (stainless steel)
- hygro-thermometer
- honey container with innovative “pipe-system” (43 ml)
- small honey plate
- water container with innovative “wick-system” (43 ml)
- small water bowl
- terracotta feeding dish
- 2x steel wool (spacer for moistening holes)
- decoration pebbles
- sand-clay mixture
- red plastic sheet
- felt pads under the farm

The container

… is made from polyethylene terephthalate glycol (PETG, a very rugged and food-safe plastic). The advantages of this material are that it is shatter-proof and very sturdy.

tip:

- For cleaning, just use clean paper towel, spray a little bit of window cleaner on it and avoid sand or other scratchy material.
- Don't use boiling hot water for cleaning and don't put the farm indirect sunlight. As sturdy as the material is, it will become soft at temperatures at or above 70°C. (Also important to note is that it wouldn't be good to keep the ants in direct sunlight either.)

The lid

… is hinged. Therefore, you can't accidently place it incorrectly onto the container and it can't slip. This makes the ant farm very escape-proof. The lid includes two large ventilation holes (good ventilation is essential to avoid mould!), which are secured by a stainless-steel grid (1 mm holes). No ant can ever nibble through this. Finally, it includes a hygro-thermometer. The right temperature and humidity are essential for successful ant keeping.

tip:

- Check the humidity and temperature regularly. Most ants love a moist and warm (but not hot) environment. Find a good spot for the ant farm where it won't get too warm (never next to a window) or too cold (not under the air-conditioner). Check if the lid still tightly closes from time to time. This prevents the ants from escaping.

The nest-body

… is a solid plaster block with a dry weight of more than 2.7 kg. The solidity helps to maintain the right humidity and buffers temperature variations in the nest. The nest chambers are optionally coated with natural clay (terracotta, brown or white) to simulate a natural environment and protect the eggs and larvae from drying. The body includes a further two large holes for easy and fast moistening to regulate the humidity and/or for possible decoration. There are two small holes for the water and honey containers. This makes the containers less visible (better aesthetics), and they can't tip.

tip:

- Be careful when moistening the ant farm. It is very easy to add water if the moisture level is too low, but it will take some time to decrease the moisture level if it is too high.
- You can use the large holes to plant a small plant (e.g. a succulent). Do not use artificial fertiliser as this could poison the ants. They will provide natural fertiliser themselves through their own waste.
- The colour of the clay indicates whether the nest is dry (lighter) or moist (darker). Most ant species prefer moist nests.

This picture shows how water from the large hole on the right slowly soaks into the nest body. The darker area of the clay is moist and the lighter one is still dry.

The steel-wool and pebbles

… will be used as a space holder in the in the large "moisturising holes". Place the pebble stones on top of the steel wool for aesthetic reasons. The steel wool allows water to flow through and stops the ants building a nest in this area.

Tip:

- Never use steel-wool to clean your ant farm! This will scratch it.

The water container (and small water bowl)

… contains an innovative "wick system". This prevents your ants from drowning and the water from becoming dirty (both happen frequently with open water systems). Furthermore, it's large (43 ml) to supply enough water for many days. The small water bowl is for small colonies or single queens to ensure that the ants can find the water.

Tip:

- Check the water every day. One dead insect (or a part of it) in the water can pollute it within a day.
- Change the water in the small bowl at least twice a week and the water in the container every two weeks.
- Smaller ants could drown in the small bowl. To prevent this you could add a little bit of cotton wool or small stones into the bowl, in order to provide something they can hold on.
- For cleaning, carefully use boiling hot water with nothing added. This will make the dishes sterile and doesn't add anything toxic. To avoid scalding, use tweezers and a medium-sized brush which is included in the optional tool set.

Info:

- A permanent fresh water supply for drinking is the most important thing to keep your ants alive! When you leave the ants for a longer period (e.g., holidays) please ensure that the water supply will suffice for the entire time.

The honey container (and the small honey plate)

… is large (43 ml) and makes long-term feeding possible. The newly invented “pipe system” creates a small area where the ants can drink/eat with a lower risk of sticking to the honey and drowning in it. At the same time, it has a large honey-storing capacity. The pipe is roughened from the inside to prevent ants from slipping. Additionally, we added a small feeding dish for very small amounts of honey (1-3 drops) for small colonies or single queens. This makes it easier for the ants to find the honey and less likely that ants will drown.

Tip:

- Put a very small amount (such as one drop) of honey into the honey plate. The larger the amount, the larger the chance of drowning.
- I personally recommend pure liquid honey. It is natural and does not mould too fast. Nevertheless, check the honey regularly.
- For cleaning, carefully use boiling hot water with nothing added. This will make the dishes sterile and doesn’t add anything toxic. To avoid scalding, use tweezers and a medium-sized brush which is included in the optional tool set.

Info:

- Sugar (incl. the sugar in the honey) is needed by the adult ants as their main food source.

The terracotta dish

… is for serving freshly killed insects (please not poisoned ones) as a protein source.

Tip:

- For small colonies it should be sufficient to catch an insect from time to time. For larger colonies or several ant farms, you can buy living insects (e.g., crickets or cockroaches) in pet stores or online. You can freeze them straight away or, what I would recommend, feed them with fresh veggies (cucumber, carrots, etc), oats (rolled or cut) and dry dog- or cat-food to make them more nutritious. You could even start your own “food-insect” farm. Important is to keep the food-insect farm dry (not too many wet veggies), because these insects like a dry environment and prevents it from smelling. This process makes obtaining the protein supply for your ants much easier.
- For cleaning, carefully use boiling hot water with nothing added. This will make the dishes sterile and doesn’t add anything toxic. To avoid scalding, use tweezers and a medium-sized brush which is included in the optional tool set.

Info:

- Protein is mainly needed by the larvae. The growth rate of your colony can be regulated by the amount of protein you feed the ants.

The sand-clay mixture

… can be used as a decorative element to form the terrain of your choice. Fill some of the sand-clay mixture into the outside area (arena) of your ant farm with the spoon. Spread it with a brush (part of the optional tool set) however you please (place the cups via the small holes beforehand and don´t let too much sand get into the large holes.) Spray the sand-cay mixture carefully with water (a water sprayer comes with the optional tool set). Repeat spreading sand and spraying until you are happy with the result. Because of the clay in the sand, it will become slightly firm and will stay in place.

Tip:

- Your ants will change the farm over the time, including moving sand and keeping waste (bits of old insects etc.) in the arena. If you need to remove the waste (for instance with the spoon), you can use a small amount of fresh sand-clay mixture to rearrange the ground afterwards.

Info:

- The larvae from some ant species use sand or other materials to build a cocoon. Some ants use sand to "decorate" the nest or they build walls from it. So, it is important to give them some materials, such as our sand, so they can live as naturally as possible. Additionally, you could add any non-toxic decorations as you like (e.g., other sand, leaves, bark, little stones, branches, etc.)

The red sheet

… can be used in the beginning to protect your young colony from too much disturbance. Just stick the foil over the main breeding chambers using sticky tape. These block most of the light and give the ants some peace, while allowing you to still see them. After the colony is large enough, you can remove the foil if desired.

Info: It is argued as to whether ants can or can't see the colour red. If they can´t see it, it would be dark for them behind the foil. This would be optimal. If they can see red, the foil would make it darker behind it. Either way, the foil will help your ants to settle down and start their colony in a more relaxed way.

The felt pads

... are fitted under the ant farm to protect your furniture from scratches and the ants from smaller vibrations.

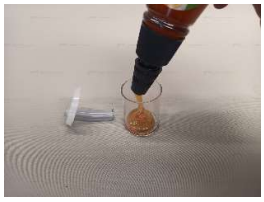
setup:

1. Stretch out the steel wool balls to create a larger volume and place them into the large holes.



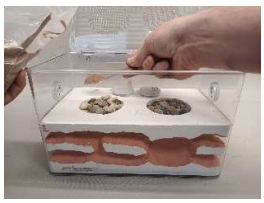
2. Place the pebbles over the steel wool.


3. Fill the honey container with some honey and the water container with water.
<u>cave:</u> Soak the wick with separate water

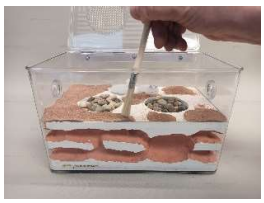


4. Place both containers into the associated holes.

5. Carefully place some sand-clay mixture into the farm.
<u>cave:</u> ensure that the nest entry is blocked by cotton wool.




6. Distribute the mixture carefully. Avoid to much sand in the holes.
   Spray the mixture with water.




7. Check where the mixture isn't covering the ground and add bit extra.
   Spray the dry parts with water.

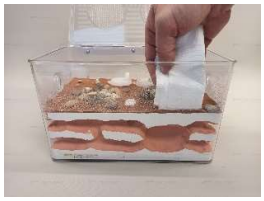


8. Decorate the ground with some stones if desired and place the dishes.



9. Fill the dishes with water and honey.


10. Clean the walls carefully without touching the ground.



11. Shake (!) the bottle of PTFE and add some PTFE onto the tip of the sponge brush.



12. Apply the PTFE carefully at the upper end of the ant farm (about 2 cm).
   <u>cave:</u> Take care to do this carefully in the corners and at the back side. Reapply this coating roughly half-yearly or as necessary.



13. Close the PTFE bottle carefully so that it doesn't dry out. With correct use and storage, the PTFE should last for several years.

14. Remove the protective film from the red sheet and mount it with sticky tape in front of the main nest chamber.


15. Remove the cotton wool from the nest entry.

16. Last but not least, release the residents into their new home.
tip: Do not release only a single ant queen. The nest is too big for her alone; she needs workers as fellow residents in order that she can live well in it.



How do ants accept our ant farms?

After a few minutes:

After one night: