



OVERVIEW

Novomessor — Desert Long-Legged Ants — are among the most entertaining and fastest-growing ant species in the hobby. Native to the desert Southwest, they're built for heat and activity. Their unusually long legs give them a quick, fluid stride that makes even routine foraging look like a performance.

They're active hunters that take down insects with enthusiasm. In the right setup with consistent heat and regular feeding, colonies can explode in size within the first year. If you want a colony that's always doing something, Novomessor delivers.

They do not sting but will bite if threatened.

DIFFICULTY

BEGINNER – INTERMEDIATE

Straightforward once the basics are dialed in: consistent heat, regular protein, and a secure enclosure. The intermediate label comes from their escape behavior — skilled climbers that require bi-weekly fluon reapplication. Stay on top of that and they're easy.

TEMPERAMENT

High-energy foragers. Workers move fast, hunt aggressively, and are almost always active during warm periods. They will bite if handled directly but are not aggressive toward keepers. More relevant is their escape tendency: they probe every seam and gap in the enclosure. A well-maintained fluon barrier keeps them contained.

FEEDING

Protein (primary): Mealworms, cricket pieces, Dubia roach nymphs, fruit flies. Scale prey size with colony size. Remove uneaten protein within 24–48 hours.

Liquid sugars (constant): Sugar water (1:3), hummingbird nectar, fruit, or Sunburst Ant Nectar. Keep available at all times.

Seeds (supplemental): Dandelion, Kentucky bluegrass, crushed sunflower. Useful for larvae between protein feedings — not a protein replacement.

Avoid: Uneaten protein left over 48 hours. Overloading the outworld with seeds.

HABITAT

Recommended: Test tube setup for founding; tub-and-tube or acrylic formicarium once nanitics are established; modular design with a visible outworld.

Avoid: Gel farms; enclosures without a secure gapless lid or fluon barrier on interior walls.

Once nanitics are foraging, add a mini outworld to the test tube to give workers a place to hunt and deposit waste before transitioning to a full formicarium.

RECOMMENDED SUPPLIES

- Heat Cable
- Sunburst Ant Nectar
- AntVac — outworld seed husk cleanup
- Bamboo Tube Nest
- 5ml Liquid Feeder
- Fluon



Photo by Sue Carnahan

TEMPERATURE

Heat is the single most important variable. Colonies will not grow at room temperature alone — supplemental heat is required, not optional.

- **Optimal nest range:** 87–95°F with a gradient
- **Gradient:** Peak temp one end; cooler zones for self-regulation
- **Do not refrigerate:** Cold diapause is not required and can be fatal

Use a heat cable along one side of the nest. Never place heat directly next to the water source — condensation can flood tubes or chambers.

HUMIDITY

Maintain a gradient: one moist end for brood, one dry end for food storage. Founding test tubes handle this naturally via the cotton plug. In a formicarium, keep one side lightly moistened and the other dry. The outworld should be kept dry.

GROWTH

Brood develops egg to adult in 4–7 weeks depending on temperature and caste. Well-maintained colonies reach hundreds of workers in year one; power-feeding with consistent heat can push into the thousands. Workers increase in size as the colony matures. Growth is controlled by two variables: heat and protein frequency.

To slow growth: reduce feeding frequency, remove supplemental seeds, and omit supplemental heat.

COMMON CHALLENGES

Problem	Likely Cause	Fix
Colony stalled	Temperature too low	Add heat; target 87–95°F in nest
Ants escaping	Fluon degraded or missing	Reapply fluon; inspect lids and tubing
Queen eating brood	Disturbance or heat/hydration stress	Leave setup alone; check heat & water
Mold in outworld	Uneaten food left too long	Remove protein within 24–48 hours
Larvae not eating	Prey too large	Reduce size; try fruit flies
Seed debris buildup	Seeds accumulating	Reduce volume; use AntVac