



## OVERVIEW

Pogonomyrmex are iconic North American harvester ants distributed across western and southern US deserts, grasslands, and semi-arid plains. Workers forage in organized trails, hauling seeds back to process into *ant bread* — the colony's primary food source. Active digging behavior and striking red/orange/black coloration make them highly observable.

The sting is painful — containment is essential. Climbing ability varies by species: **poor climbers** (*occidentalis*, *maricopa*, *californicus*) cannot scale glass or acrylic. **Good climbers** (*bicolor*, *barbatus*, *rugosus*) require fluon or a physical escape barrier.

## DIFFICULTY

### BEGINNER

Forgiving genus. Core needs: consistent heat, seeds, appropriate nest. The sting is worth respecting but doesn't complicate husbandry.

## TEMPERAMENT

Task-focused workers — foraging, seed processing, digging. Will sting when threatened or disturbed. Avoid direct handling. Use tubing connectors and test tube adapters for colony transfers rather than opening the nest.

## FEEDING

**Seeds (primary — replaces sugar/nectar):** Kentucky bluegrass, dandelion, chia, sand dropseed, canary seed, millet. Check 2–3×/week and remove any sprouted or moldy seeds promptly.

**Protein (supplement):** Fruit flies, small cricket or mealworm pieces a few times/week. Supports larvae and queen health; not required for a well-seeded colony.

**Avoid:** Large oily seeds in young colonies (mold risk before workers can process them); food accumulating in the outworld; more seeds than the colony can manage.

## HABITAT

**Recommended:** Bamboo tube nests (preferred — natural dimensions, passive moisture regulation); standard test tubes for founding; acrylic or naturalistic designs with a visible outworld.

**Avoid:** Gel farms; setups not designed for queen colonies. Transition from founding setup to a formicarium at 10–15 workers.

## RECOMMENDED SUPPLIES

- **Heat Cable**
- **Seeds:** Dandelion, Kentucky Bluegrass, Sand Dropseed
- **AntVac** — outworld seed husk cleanup
- **Bamboo Tube Nest**
- **5ml Liquid Feeder**
- **Fluon** — required for good-climber species



## TEMPERATURE

Heat is the primary driver of brood development. Development slows substantially below 75°F.

- **Optimal range:** 80–95°F with a gradient
- **Brood incubation:** 88–90°F in part of the nest
- **Cooler zones:** Low 80s for worker self-regulation
- **Daily heating:** 10–12 hours

Use a heat cable or mat on one side only to create the gradient. Never place heat directly beside water sources — condensation can flood tubes or nest chambers.

## HUMIDITY

Moderate nest humidity is fine despite their arid native habitat. The primary concern is mold in seed storage chambers — prevent it with good airflow, not by drying out the nest. Bamboo tube nests self-regulate moisture naturally. Founding chambers can be kept quite humid; as seed storage scales up, ensure adequate ventilation.

## GROWTH

Egg to worker in 25–35 days at optimal temperature. First-year colonies: a few dozen to several hundred workers. Established colonies can reach thousands.

## COMMON CHALLENGES

Problem	Likely Cause	Fix
Seeds molding in nest	Poor airflow or excess moisture	Improve ventilation; remove promptly
Seeds sprouting	Not processed fast enough	Remove sprouted seeds 2–3×/week
Brood not developing	Temperature too low	Raise heat; target 88–92°F
Queen eating eggs	Dehydration or heat stress	Check water access; verify heat
Workers ignoring protein	Seed supply abundant	Temporarily reduce seeds