Invite Ants to Lunch

by Sue Smith-Heavenrich

Ants may be tiny—but they're serious eaters! Try these neat experiments to find out what ants in your backyard like to eat.

Ants love a picnic. And just like you, they have favorite foods. For example, harvester ants from the southwestern United States collect seeds. Carpenter ants like to eat insects and juicy fruits. Leafcutter ants munch on fungus salads that they grow in underground gardens.

Want to find out what the ants in your neighborhood like to eat? Place small amounts of different foods on the edge of an upside-down plate. You can use peanut butter, honey, mashed banana, grated apple or cheese, and seeds (such as barley, sunflower seeds without shells, or sesame seeds).

Put this feeding station where there are lots of ants. Wait three minutes and count the number of ants feeding on each food. Count how many there are every three minutes. (You can keep track of the info by writing it down in a notebook.)

What happens if two different kinds of ants come to your picnic? Watch and find out! (Most likely you'll get just one kind though.)

Fussy Eaters?

(5) Ants don't always take the first food they find. Instead, they may investigate, touching many pieces of food with their antennae. *What does this bit taste like? Exactly how big is it?* Those are the kinds of things the ants are checking out. When they finally choose a food, the ants carry it back to their nest.

Do your ants prefer big seeds or smaller ones? Sweet crumbs or less sweet ones? Here's a test: Give ants a choice between full-strength honey and a honey-water mixture (add one teaspoon of honey to five teaspoons of water). Offer a few drops of each choice side-by-side at a feeding station. Then every three minutes count the number of ants you see near each site.

How Far Will They Go?

Want to see how far ants travel when they go out to collect food?

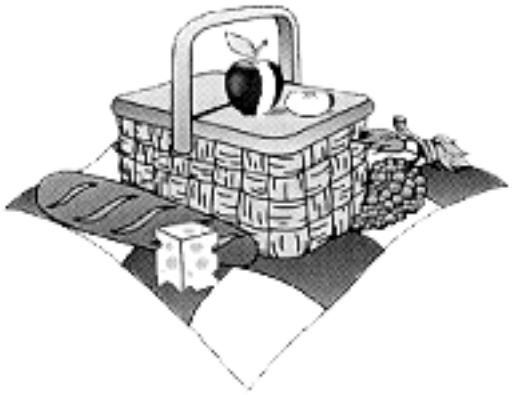
First find an ant nest. You can do that by following some ants when they carry food home. Now you know how far the ants traveled to get to your food station. Next, move the food station about one foot (30 cm) farther from the nest. Do the ants find it? If so, move the station again. Keep moving the station until the ants no longer show up.

Spreading The News

Once ants find a food they like, they work quickly to collect it. Usually they try to get their nestmates to help. How long does it take an ant to tell others that there's food nearby? To find out, offer their favorite food at a feeding station. After the first ant finds the food, begin counting the ants at the food source every minute. Also, watch their behavior. When the first ant heads home, what does it do when it gets near one of its nestmates? Does it feed the other ant a bit of food? Or do the two touch their antennae together? Is the ant with the food dragging its back end on the ground? It may be leaving a trail of smelly chemicals that leads

to the food.

Can you think of any other cool "ant-picnic" experiments to try? How about offering a second picnic in a different place? Do the ants there act differently? *Whew*—enough questions! Go on outside and start asking some yourself!



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1. What is the ***main*** purpose of this selection?

   A to teach the reader about different kinds of ants

   B to teach the reader about ants' antennae

   C to teach the reader how to find out what ants like to eat

   D to teach the reader how to find out where ants live

2. Why does the author ***most likely*** begin the article by saying "Ants love a picnic"?

   A to show that ants enjoy sitting down to eat with their friends

   B to get the reader's attention by showing that in some ways ants are like people

   C to show that ants like to eat the same food every day all year long

   D to show that ants love to have lots of fun

3. In paragraph 5, the author says ants "may investigate, touching many pieces of food with their antennae." What does the word *investigate* mean?

   A quickly look at something

   B quickly eat something

   C carefully hide something

   D carefully check something out

4. In paragraph 5, who is ***most likely*** asking the questions written in italics?

   A students

   B scientists

   C the reader

   D ants

5. What are an ant's antennae ***most like***?

   A a person's hands

   B a person's hair

   C a person's ears

   D a person's feet

6. How can a person find out how far ants will travel to find a food station?

   A by moving the food station farther away

   B by changing the food in the food station

   C by showing the food station to different ants

   D by removing the food station for one month

7. What did the author ***most likely*** want a reader to learn in this selection?

   A how much food ants can eat

   B how to study ant behavior

   C how to tell different ant species

   D how to feed ants at home

End of Set

EOG Grade 3 Reading Sample Items

Selection Title	Question Number	Correct Answer	Thinking Skill	Objective Number
Invite Ants to Lunch	1	C	Analyzing	2.04
Invite Ants to Lunch	2	B	Organizing	3.02
Invite Ants to Lunch	3	D	Applying	2.02
Invite Ants to Lunch	4	D	Analyzing	2.04
Invite Ants to Lunch	5	A	Analyzing	2.02
Invite Ants to Lunch	6	A	Organizing	2.04
Invite Ants to Lunch	7	B	Generating	2.04