

Name _____



What Does a Termite Look Like?

Termites may not be the flashiest insects, but they have fascinating features that help them thrive in their environment. These tiny creatures vary in size, color, and shape depending on their role in the colony, but they all share certain traits that make them easy to recognize.

Size and Shape

Most termites are very small, ranging from 1/8 inch to 1/2 inch long, about the size of a grain of rice. The queen termite, however, can grow much larger, reaching up to several inches in length. Termites have soft, elongated bodies, and their legs are short but strong, allowing them to move easily through soil and wood.

Color

Termites are usually pale in color, often a creamy white or light brown. Their soft bodies lack the hard, shiny shells seen on other insects like beetles. Some soldier termites, which protect the colony, may have darker heads and strong jaws that stand out against their pale bodies.

Specialized Body Parts

Different types of termites in a colony have unique body parts that suit their jobs. Workers, the most common type, are small and simple-looking, with no wings. Soldiers are larger and have strong, sharp jaws used to defend the colony from predators like ants. Reproductive termites, called alates, are the only ones with wings. These wings are long and delicate, allowing them to fly when they leave the colony to start new ones. After they land, their wings break off.

Other Unique Features

A termite's antennae are straight, unlike the bent ones on ants, which is a quick way to tell the two insects apart. Another unique trait of termites is their ability to digest cellulose, the material found in wood and plants. They carry special bacteria in their guts that break down tough plant fibers, turning wood into food. Though termites are small and often overlooked, their specialized bodies and abilities make them some of nature's most impressive insects.