Ant Farm Care Guide

A whole tiny city you can watch being built

Some experience helps



HOME	CARE TIME	COST	LIFESPAN	CUDDLINESS
Small space	A little	$2–$8/mo (whole group)	5–15 years (a queen-led colony)	Best to watch

AWAKE WHEN	HANDLING	COMPANY	KID-FRIENDLY	ALLERGIES
Awake in the daytime	Look, don't touch	Needs a friend	★★★★☆	Allergy-friendly

Setting up costs about $20–$80 up front, before the monthly costs.

An ant farm is the classic watch-it-happen pet: a see-through home where a colony digs tunnels, builds nurseries, and works together like a tiny city. The honest secret is the queen — a workers-only kit lasts weeks to months, while a real queen-led colony can thrive for 5–15 years and grow from a test tube into a bustling metropolis. Either way, it's the cheapest window into animal teamwork there is.

Is an ant farm a good pet for kids?

Quick answer: Ants are great pets for most kids.

- **Best for:** watch teamwork, tunnels, and a real working city, awake and busy in the daytime
- **Keep in mind:** strictly watch-only — never a holding pet
- **Lifespan:** 5–15 years (a queen-led colony)
- **Ongoing cost:** about $2–$8/mo (setup & vet extra)

Company: Ants only exist as a colony — a queen and her workers are one big family that works as a team. A lone ant is a lost ant.

Check your local laws: US rules (USDA) don't allow queen ants to be shipped across state lines, so mail-order kits come with workers only. For a real, lasting colony, catch a queen locally or buy from a seller in your own state.

Is an ant colony right for us?

Why you'll love an ant colony

- Watch teamwork, tunnels, and a real working city
- A queen colony lasts for many years
- Awake and busy in the daytime
- Costs almost nothing to feed and run

Things to know

- Strictly watch-only — never a holding pet
- Kits without a queen only last weeks to months
- Escapes are a real risk without a good lid
- Queens can't be mail-ordered across state lines (US)

The honest answer: Yes, but buy a queen, not a toy — a workers-only gel farm dies in weeks, while a real queen keeps a colony going for a decade.

👍 Get one if...

- Your kids want a pet awake in daylight
- You're willing to catch or buy a real queen
- You find teamwork more interesting than cuddling
- You want a decade-long pet for pennies

👎 Think again if...

- You expect a boxed gel kit to last
- Your child needs to touch their pet
- Your kids would lose interest before the first tunnel
- You'd start little kids on stinging harvester ants

How to care for your Ant Farm

Home
A secure, escape-proof ant habitat: a classic sand farm for workers, or a test tube then a small "formicarium" with an attached open-air feeding area for a queen colony.

Food & water
Sugar water or honey water for energy, plus tiny bits of insects or mealworm for protein. A colony eats astonishingly little.

Health
Keep the nest at room temperature, out of direct sun, lightly humid, and never shake or flood it. Escape-proof the lid.

Handling & play
Watch, don't touch — ants are delicate, some can pinch or sting, and the colony does best undisturbed.

Allergies
No fur or dander — an ant farm is a great allergy-friendly pet. It's strictly hands-off either way.

✅ Before you bring an ant colony home

An ant farm is a watch-only pet: a see-through colony that digs, builds, and works as a team. A workers-only kit lasts weeks to months; a queen-led colony can last 5–15 years.

Room at home

An ant habitat takes up less room than a lunchbox — a steady shelf out of direct sunlight is perfect. Sun through glass can overheat a nest fast.

Supplies to get first

Get a secure ant habitat (or a test-tube setup for a new queen), an outworld or feeding area, sugar water or ant nectar, tiny bits of insect food, and a magnifying glass.

Finding a vet

There's no vet for ants — the colony's health is all about steady room temperature, gentle humidity, no direct sun, and not disturbing the nest.

Money & emergencies

Nothing to insure — an ant colony runs on pennies. The real investment is patience while a young colony grows.

🗒️ Your routine — tick them off

☀️ Every day

- ☐ A no-tapping look at what the colony is up to

📅 Every week

- ☐ Offer sugar water and a tiny protein snack
- ☐ Remove leftovers
- ☐ Check the water supply

🌙 Now & then

- ☐ Clean the outworld
- ☐ Check the escape barrier
- ☐ Watch how the brood is growing

💰 **Monthly cost:** Tiny: a habitat, a starter colony or captured queen, and pennies of food — sugar water and the odd insect.

🤩 Fun facts

- A black garden ant queen once lived almost 29 years — the record for any insect.
- Ants leave invisible scent trails so nest-mates can follow them straight to food.
- An ant can carry many times its own body weight — like a kid lifting a car.

📚 Where this comes from

Vets, charities & official guidance

- Invertebrate pets and permits — USDA APHIS (aphis.usda.gov)
- Ants — UC Statewide IPM Program (ipm.ucanr.edu)
- Red harvester ant — Texas A&M AgriLife Extension (texasinsects.tamu.edu)
- Carpenter ants — University of Maine Cooperative Extension (extension.umaine.edu)

Keeper & species-community guides

- Life cycle of an ant colony — ASU Ask A Biologist (askabiologist.asu.edu)
- Lasius niger longevity record — AnAge database (genomics.senescence.info)

This guide is general care information for families, not veterinary advice. Every pet is different: if yours seems unwell, call a vet.
Sources checked August 2026; this guide matches the web page as of Oct 29, 2026.
More on the website (the full care guide, questions families ask, types and breeds, and the "Am I ready?" check):
whatpetshouldiget.com/pets/ants.html