

Why I Love Orange Oil

By The Termite Guy,
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Being in the termite business for 20 years I have seen a lot of gimmicks come and go. But I really have become fond of this orange oil stuff, for reasons that I will explain.

In the past there have been companies that have sold methods that used liquid nitrogen and would “freeze their buns off.” This company ended up getting sued out of business. And then there is the microwave bandwagon; this is the funniest of them all. I had the sales man, for the microwave, out to my office once and he showed up with his own supply of 1 foot 2 X 4’s and was going to show me how he could kill termites. Just as we were going to get started one of my trucks drove in with some 2 X 12 fascia that he had just removed from a home and it was loaded with live termites. I asked the guy to use one of the boards from the back of the truck; he reluctantly agreed. He spent 3 hours on this one fascia board and could not kill anything. After he was exhausted and perturbed, I think he knew I was not going to be an easy sale. We cut the board into pieces and found live termites everywhere. Needless to say, we did not buy what he was selling.

Some companies are touting the use of fiber optics to locate termites. I have tried and purchased these gadgets, however all I can see is bunch of insulation. Even if the house were un-insulated it would still require a few thousand holes to be drilled into the drywall before you could really say that you have gotten them all. I have been around enough teardowns or houses that are under major construction to see that I would have never have seen 90% of the infestations that I can find in a house without and drywall or insulation.

Yes, this is a business that attracts all kinds of snake oil salesmen. For the biggest reason that it is so difficult to know if the termites are actually dead and that fumigation by means of tenting is such a large inconvenience. The elephant in the room is the fact that no one can find termites. Termites do not start to kick out their excrement till about their fourth year of living in the wood.

The fact is that fumigation (tenting) is still the only way to get all of the termites in a given structure. And if tenting is not an option, for any one of several reasons, then we have very low toxicity products--and many of these products are lower in toxicity than orange oil (but don’t have quite the visual pleasantness of an orange being unwrapped). Many of the products that we use are made by companies that have spent many years engineering and testing. They are companies like Bayer, BASF and Dow. These are companies that spend millions to make sure that product is safe and transports through timbers with ease. Orange oil has never been tested with positive results and the state has determined that it can only be advertised with the disclaimer that it “kills on contact.” Orange oil is no better a weapon in the eradication of termites than olive oil, peanut oil, or gasoline. Yes, I said gasoline. Gasoline kills termites, but would you put it your walls? Orange oil is just as flammable as gasoline and can be used as an igniter for a campfire at San Onofre. Been there, done that.

And now, why do I love orange oil? Well, because these companies that are advertising on NBC during primetime and obsessively covering the radio with 30-second termite spots are blowing up the average cost of termite treatments. These companies are selling their services for 5 times the industry average and its increasing the average cost of a termite service. Since I have been in the business (1989) the prices for termite control have remained pretty stagnant with only minor price increases. In the industry, a standard local treatment has been in the \$750 price range and now the orange oil people are getting upwards of \$3,500 for a standard local treatment. I am sure that it is necessary to charge this much to cover the necessary \$300,000 cost per month in advertising and standard overhead.

Yes, the producers of the product are touting huge profits from selling orange oil termite eradication. Well they can have their profit margins and the flurry of consumer complaints that are sure to follow.