

Ants

Many of the plants in the rainforest rely on ants to aggressively attack other insects, large herbivores, or vines that might harm or grow on the plant. In addition to protection, the plant absorbs the nutrient-rich waste of the ants. The ants are provided with food (nectar, starches, protein or lipids) and a place to live, a relationship that benefits both the plant and the ants.

These plants (*myrmecophytes*) can have many forms, providing housing for the ants in different ways: hollow thorns, cavities in the bark, modified stems or leaves. In some epiphytes, ants build nests in overlapping basal leaves that collect litter. In RATTANS, ants live in swollen woody chambers. When something touches the plant, the ants rattle their mandibles against the chambers, scaring away the intruder.



protecting



Cecropia trees have colonies of *Azteca* ants living in their hollow stems. Plants in this genus produce **Mullerian bodies** rich in starch and lipids located at the base of petioles, a nutrient-rich resource for the ants.

Most of these plants are so dependent on the ants that their seedlings would die if their ant protectors weren't around.

Plants