

Control of Red Imported Fire Ants

Trying to control red imported fire ants over large areas is difficult. Once they enter an area, they will begin to spread. The best practice is to control them in places where people are active.

To get rid of a fire ant colony, the queen must be killed. Two methods can be used: baits or drenches.

Baits are pellets made of insecticide and ant food that can be spread on the ground. Worker ants bring the bait back to the colony where it will be eaten by the queen. Baits work slowly but are good for large areas with many mounds.

Drenches are insecticides mixed with water and poured into the mound. About a gallon of mix is needed to soak the mound and reach the queen. Drenches work quickly and are good for homeowners with just a few fire ant mounds.

Homeowners can buy baits and drenches where lawn and garden products are sold.

It is important to read and carefully follow label directions when using insecticides.



Treatment of Red Imported Fire Ant Stings

For just a few stings that cause only small welts, wash the area with soap and water, and apply antiseptic cream. For a large number of stings or a bad skin reaction to a fire ant bite, see a doctor.



Red Imported Fire Ants



Some Facts

NEED MORE INFORMATION?

Contact your local health department or the Public Health Pest Management Section at (919) 733-6407.



N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources
Division of Environmental Health
Public Health Pest Management Section
<http://www.deh.enr.state.nc.us/phpm/index.htm>

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Red imported fire ants come from South America. They were brought by boat to Alabama around 1940. Since then, they have spread across the southern half of the United States, including most of eastern North Carolina. They are called 'fire ants' because of their painful sting.

Biology of Red Imported Fire Ants

Fire ants live in a group or colony that may have 100,000 or more ants. The colony is led by a queen that lays about 200 eggs a day. The queen never leaves the nest and can live for many years.

The other ants in the colony are workers that take care of the queen and her eggs, build the nest, defend the colony and find food. Fire ants prefer protein-rich food such as insects and seeds, but will eat most anything. Like a wasp, workers have a small stinger on the tail that can inject venom.

At times, the colony will also have winged male and female ants. During the spring and summer, these ants fly from the colony and mate in the air. The males die, but the females become queens and start new colonies.

Fire ants build a mound that is about one to two feet wide and one to one and half feet high. The mound is usually built in a sunny, open spot and rarely in woods or other shaded places. The ants move up or down in the mound to where the temperature is best. Sometimes fire ants will nest inside houses. Fire ants need a mild climate and are not likely to spread further north or west than the eastern half of North Carolina.



Problems Caused By Red Imported Fire Ants

Fire ants are a problem because of their mounds and sting.

Large numbers of fire ant mounds in a field can damage farm equipment. Parks, ball fields, lawns and roadsides can be hard to use or look bad because of fire ant mounds.

Fire ant stings can hurt both animals and people. When fire ants attack, they bite the skin with their jaws and then jab the skin with their stinger. The same ant may sting many times and not die.

Most people will have some reaction to a fire ant sting. It usually causes a sharp pain and a small red welt. The pain stops in a few minutes. After several hours, the welt becomes pus-filled and itchy. It may take several weeks to heal. Scratching the sting may cause an infection.

In some cases, a much larger area of skin around the sting may become swollen and red.

Rarely, like a wasp or bee sting, fire ant stings may cause hives, trouble breathing or even death. You must find medical help at once for such a sting.