

RED IMPORTED FIRE ANTS



The red imported fire ant (RIFA) is a nuisance, and its sting can cause medical problems. Fire ants can interfere with outdoor activities and harm wildlife. The mounds are unsightly and may reduce land values.

Come into our nursery and buy the ***Organic Ant Killer*** we offer to get rid of fire ant mounds for good!

Fire Ant Biology

Red imported fire ant colonies consist of the brood (eggs, larvae and pupae) and several types of adults:

- Winged males (distinguished from the females by their smaller heads and black bodies)
- Red-brown winged females
- One or more queens (wingless, mated females)
- Workers

The ants build mounds in almost any type of soil, but prefer open, sunny areas such as pastures, parks, lawns, meadows and cultivated fields. Mounds can reach 18 inches in height, depending upon the type of soil. Often mounds are located in rotting logs, and around stumps and trees. Colonies can also be found in or under buildings. Colonies frequently migrate from one site to another. The queen needs only about six workers to start a new colony. They can develop a new mound, several hundred feet away from their previous location, almost overnight.

Where They Infest

Fire ants commonly infest lawns, schoolyards, athletic fields, golf courses and parks. In these places, they pose a medical threat to people and animals. Their mounds also detract from the aesthetic value of the landscape.

Homes and Buildings

The ants form colonies close to homes and buildings, they sometimes forage indoors for food and moisture, particularly during hot, dry summer months.

Home Gardens

Ants occasionally feed on vegetable plants in home gardens. The worst damage usually occurs during hot, dry weather. Ants may also be a nuisance to gardeners during weeding and harvesting.

Electrical Equipment and Utility Housings

Like many other ants, fire ants frequently infest electrical equipment. They chew on insulation and can cause short circuits or interfere with switching mechanisms. Air conditioners, traffic signal boxes, and other devices can be damaged. Fire ants also nest in housings around electrical and utility units. The ants move into these structures, which causes shorting and other mechanical problems.

Compost Piles, Mulched Flowerbeds, Pavement Cracks, etc.

Fire ants invade compost piles and mulched flowerbeds seeking warmth and moisture. They also nest under cracked pavement, removing dirt from underneath sidewalks and roadways and aggravating structural problems. Colonies in these sites may be difficult to locate.

Around Bodies of Water

The ants require water to survive and are often found near creeks, runoff ditches, streams, rivers, ponds, lakes and other bodies of water. If surface water is unavailable, they tunnel down to the ground water table many feet below the ground.

Medical Problems

Fire ants are aggressive and will defensively attack anything that disturbs them. They can sting repeatedly. After firmly grasping the skin with its jaws, the fire ant arches its back as it inserts its rear-end stinger into the flesh, injecting venom from the poison sac. It then typically inflicts an average of seven to eight stings in a circular pattern. Fire ant venom is unique because of the high concentration of toxins, which are responsible for the burning characteristic of such stings.

Symptoms of a sting include burning and itching, which usually subsides within 60 minutes. This is followed by the formation of a small blister at the site of each sting, within the next four hours. And, a white pustule forms in a day or two. Treatment is aimed at preventing secondary bacterial infection, which may occur if the pustule is scratched or broken.

Although the stings are not usually life threatening, they are easily infected and may leave permanent scars. On rare occasions, anaphylaxis – or a generalized, systemic allergic reaction to the fire ant stings – can occur, and may be life threatening. It usually occurs in persons sensitized by a previous sting. It may be manifested by flushing, general hives, swelling of the face, eyes, or throat, chest pains, nausea, severe sweating, loss of breath, serious swelling or slurred speech. If this occurs, the person should immediately seek emergency medical assistance.

Treatment

Elevate the extremity and apply ice or a cold compress to reduce swelling and relieve pain. Clean blisters with soap and water to prevent secondary infection. Do not break the blister. Topical steroid ointments and oral antihistamines may relieve the itching associated with these reactions. Treatment with antihistamines and oral steroids may be useful in severe cases.

Tips for Avoiding Medical Problems:

- Fire ant allergic patients should wear closed-toe shoes, socks, and gloves when gardening, and take other precautions to avoid stings.
- Fire ant mounds near the home should be identified and treated with an ant bait insecticide.
- Teach children about fire ants and their hazards. These preventive measures should help reduce the health hazards caused by fire ant stings. Your allergist can provide you with more information on fire ant stings.