

Managing Fire Ants

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BEGIN YOUR FIRE ANT WAR THIS AUTUMN

Battle the fire ants in autumn, prevent in spring; it's as easy as counting to three. By beginning your fire ant control program in the autumn and following a regular maintenance schedule thereafter, you'll see fewer ants, and will spend less time on



injured reserve because of ant stings.

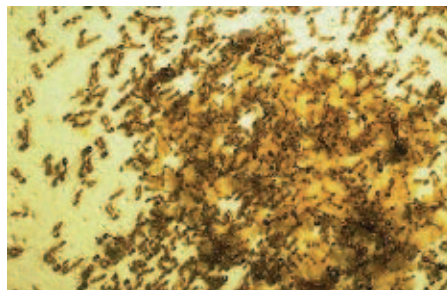
Late August through early October is an ideal time to apply fipronil, the active ingredient found in Over 'n Out® Fire Ant Killer to your lawn. Fipronil takes only seven to 10 days to begin seeing results, and only four to six weeks to see complete control creating a 'fire ant free zone' throughout the treated area for an entire season. It's easier to be patient indoors, while the ants are holed up during the cooler months than in the spring, when you're anxious to get outdoors. The active ingredient, fipronil, is undetectable to fire ants, which increases the probability of the chemical destroying the entire colony, including the queen. Imported fire ants are less active during the winter months, but with urban environments providing warm, protected nesting areas, ants continue to survive the southern states' winters. It is common to find fire ant mounds along driveways, walkways, or foundations where the ants get heat from solar radiation on concrete.

These same areas also provide ants with moisture due to runoff which helps colonies survive conditions they might otherwise would not.

In the spring, early March through late April should be the time to prevent fire ant infestation for your summer. It's best to apply fire ant control in early spring before the insect is visually active. Unlike current products on the market, fipronil requires only one application for season-long control, up to one year! Getting your neighbors involved in your prevention will keep you safe for a longer period of time.

FIRE ANTS MULTIPLY

Fire ants have few natural enemies in the United States, so they can quickly spread and displace many native ant species. The colony begins with the winged forms, called reproductives, which live in the mound until finding a mating flight, which usually occurs in the afternoon, soon after a rainy period.



Mating flights can occur at any time of the year, but they are most common in spring and fall. Males die soon after mating, while the fertilized queen finds a suitable nesting site, sheds her wings, and begins digging a chamber in which to start a new colony. Sometimes, several queens can be found within a single initial nesting site. A newly-mated queen lays a cluster of about a dozen eggs. When they hatch seven to 10 days later, the larvae are fed by the queen. Later, a queen supplied with food by worker ants can lay up to 800 eggs per

day, on average. Larvae develop six to 10 days and then pupate. Adults emerge in nine to 15 days. The average colony contains 100,000 to 500,000 workers and up to several hundred winged forms and queens.



Queen ants can live seven years or more, while worker ants generally live approximately five weeks, although they can survive much longer. While most people think they are free of all the fire ants, there are thousands of ants running away to continue the life of the colony.

NEIGHBORHOOD PROGRAMS ARE A MUST

Attempting to rid yourself of fire ant mounds by just treating the mound will create more trouble for you and your neighbors. When a mound is destroyed, only a small portion of the entire colony is killed. The refugee ants simply move to another part of your lawn or your neighbor's yard and create their new mound. When that mound is treated, the cycle begins again.

It's a never ending cycle with only one solution: **Neighborhood Fire Ant Programs.**

If your neighborhood is too big an undertaking, residents can get good results if they simply organize the neighbors in the subdivision or on the street. Even a block of five to 10 homes can have an effect. The larger the treated area, the longer it takes the ants

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to come back. In a study done in Texas from 1998-2000, fire ant mounds were reduced by 96% from an average of five mounds in a typical yard in 0.2 per yard (source: <http://fireant.tamu.edu>) Autumn is the perfect time to create awareness for these neighborhood programs and to get ready for spring.

There are three ways to organize neighborhood programs:

1. Coordinating neighborhood

treatment. Homeowners can coordinate treatment of their entire neighborhood each year, usually once in the autumn and once in the spring. Each homeowner should receive instructions on:

- A) Appropriate fire ant products to purchase;
- B) How to properly use the product; and
- C) Treatment date(s).

Each homeowner is expected to make his own applications or arrange for treatment on the designated treatment date(s). Contingency dates should be scheduled in case rain is forecast or the temperature is less than 65 or greater than 95 degrees F on the primary treatment date.

2. Working through homeowner

associations. Homeowner associations might contract with a local commercial applicator to treat for fire ants over the entire subdivision periodically, including common areas, medians, and other community property in the area. They should be asked to evaluate the area and apply minor touch-up treatments as needed.

3. Working through city and county

government. With enough citizen support, local governments can establish fire ant control programs that treat both public areas and perhaps allow homeowners to have their properties treated for an additional fee. The municipal or county government could contract with a commercial pest control applicator. Advertising should encourage entire blocks or neighborhoods to sign up, because the

Did you know...

- Fire ants will feed on almost anything including oils, insects, animal carcasses, garbage, seeds and small birds, and animals?
- Fire ants have been known to kill lizards, birds, frogs, quail, and deer?
- Fire ants were accidentally brought to the United States in a shipment from South America in the 1930s?
- The Pacific coast is fertile ground for infestation and is the next on the list for fire ants?
- The queen needs only half a dozen workers to start a new colony, and one can develop several hundred feet away from the previous location almost overnight?

larger the area treated, the longer lasting the control. Treatments should include annual broadcast applications of a fire ant insecticide, follow-up checks, and possibly individual mound treatments. The fee paid by individual landowners could pay for the program. Even if you don't think you have fire ants this year, it's highly possible you do. Fire ants are moving north, but fortunately only for the summer because they cannot survive colder climates. However, the southern states keep them at a safe temperature so they can grow in the spring. (source: <http://fireant.tamu.edu>)

FIRE ANTS INFESTATION

Fire ants now infest more than 320 million acres in 12 southeastern states and have recently spread to California, New Mexico, and even as far north as Delaware. Although fire ants keep moving to new areas, experts predict they will not be able to survive in areas where soil temperatures drop to near freezing for more than two or three weeks.

In general, fire ants infest lawns, flowerbeds, school yards, athletic fields, golf courses, and parks.

You can find fire ant mounds:

- In pot plants in contact with the ground
- In stores of top-soil, mulch, and potting mixes
- Under landscape materials (e.g. logs, stones)
- Under timber or pallets in contact with the ground
- Adjacent to buildings
- In untidy or overgrown areas
- Near areas of permanent water (e.g. banks of dams, rivers, ponds)

Some fire ants may not have a mound and can be found near:

- Tree stumps
- Compost piles
- Hay baling machines and other farming machinery
- Hay bales or animal feed
- Mail boxes
- Electrical systems, water pumps, breaker boxes, and air conditioner systems



It's very important to remember to not upset a fire ant mound or nest. Not only will they attack, they will create a new mound somewhere else on your property as an escape. To stop them from coming on to your property, the easiest thing to do is make certain soil, mulch, potting mix, pot plants, or other items are free of the pest before bringing them onto your property.

For more information, please contact Gini Dietrich at (312) 787-7249 or gini.dietrich@armentdietrich.com.

As with all insecticides, please read and follow the use instructions on the package. For more information about fire ants and/or fipronil, log onto www.gardentech.com.

All photographs courtesy of Texas A&M University Department of Entomology. <http://fireant.tamu.edu>.