

Managing Fire Ants

A Monthly Newsletter from the makers of Over 'n Out® Fire Ant Killer

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Over 'n Out!
GARDENMAX
Fire Ant Killer



DID KATRINA DESTROY GULF COAST FIRE ANT POPULATION?

HURRICANE MAY HAVE HISTORIC CONSEQUENCES FOR BACKYARD PESTS

In August 2005, the world watched in horror as one of America's crown jewels and the surrounding region was battered by a massive tempest. The disaster of Hurricane Katrina, however, has created at least one bright spot amid a very dark situation. The Gulf Coast's population of fire ants appears to have been dealt a crippling blow by the

Air is trapped by the ants' body hair allowing them to survive, even underwater. But scientists have discovered that fire ants on the go lack the ability to keep their shape in salt water.

"They destabilized in the salt water. We're finding whole colonies have been removed," says Dr. Dale Pollet, professor of



photo by Clay Coleman. <http://claycoleman.tripod.com>

salt water flooding that devastated New Orleans and its surrounding parishes.

During flooding, water uproots entrenched fire ant populations. Fire ants are able to survive by creating a rotating ball, forming a protective sphere around the colony queen.

Welcome to the first edition in the third year of **"Managing Fire Ants."** Each month throughout the spring and summer, you will receive information to pass along to your homeowners and readers. If you have any questions or comments, please contact Alex Parker at 312-787-7249 or bugs@armentdietrich.com

entomology and an extension specialist at the Louisiana State University AgCenter in Baton Rouge. While this development has never been seen before and may encourage those engaged in the fight against fire ants, Pollet warns that this change is by no means permanent.

"We're monitoring their populations in the area. It's really too early to tell if they will

repopulate in New Orleans. The may establish themselves in the perimeter" of the beleaguered city. Pollet noted that fire ants may take up residence in the many piles of sediment or abandoned homes around the region, but there is no way yet of telling if there is an ideal setting for the fire ants' return.

The flooding that caused a mass exodus of both humans and fire ants led to hundreds of fire ant-related injuries. Pollet says doctors treated hundreds of people, including members of the media covering the hurricane. While most fire ant bites can be treated at home, the tenuous situation meant that many people were without the most basic of provisions. Scientists also

determined that fire ants under stress can inject up to twice as much toxin than is normal.

With floodwater swirling at the doors of the New Orleans Superdome, palates of aggressive fire ants drifted in the water, making it extremely difficult to rescue evacuees trying to leave the doomed stadium. Rescue workers and evacuees alike suffered from multiple fire ant bites on their

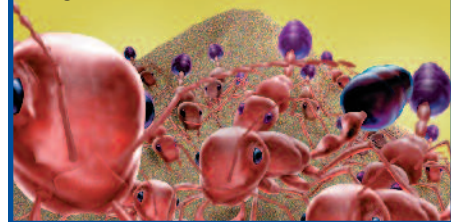
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Burned by fire ants?

Join the **fire rANT!** Over 'n Out is currently looking for fire ant experts to contribute to the Fire rANT blog, where fire ant issues will be discussed.

<http://fireants.blog.com>

Help answer consumers' questions, post research, or offer tips to help fight fire ants. Interested? E-mail us at bugs@armentdietrich.com.



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legs, arms, and even torsos. As the floodwater receded into the ocean, and as salt water was introduced into the city, the fire ants eventually destabilized and drowned.

While entomologists will continue to monitor Katrina's effect on the Gulf Coast's fire ant population, few people are lamenting the loss of the aggressive pests. Only time will tell if the hurricane's devastation will have a long-term effect on fire ants.

For a related story, see "Managing Fire Ants" Volume 2, No. 5 (August 2005), available at www.gardentech.com

FOUR SIGNS YOU HAVE FIRE ANTS

Finding fire ants in your yard can come as a terrible surprise and can have wide-spread effects on your lawn, your home, and even your neighborhood. Here are some tell-tale signs that you have fire ants:

- 1** You spot a mound or flat patch of fluffy, worked-up soil growing under your grass. Fire ants typically nest anywhere they can find moisture, hence why nests usually appear after heavy rainfall.
- 2** You spot an ant hill that doesn't have an opening at the center. Unlike typical black ants, fire ants create an intricate, underground tunneling system.
- 3** If you open a mound and see white objects, you've got immature fire ants growing in your yard. The white objects are brood, which consist of fire ant eggs, larvae, and pupae.
- 4** If you disturb a mound and masses of small, reddish-brown ants emerge...RUN! Then treat your lawn with a fipronil-based fire ant repellent.



FIRE ANT FREE! ATLANTA

If you live in or near Atlanta/Marietta, drop by Merchant's Walk in Marietta at 4101 Roswell Road on Saturday, April 29th from 9 a.m. until 2 p.m. where fire ant experts will be discussing treatment options.

Families can learn about fire ant prevention methods, how to treat stings, and participate in the Fire ANTics costume contest. The event also will include a barbeque, raffle, and product demonstrations teaching the proper application process and how to keep back yards free of fire ants.

Extension agents will be on hand to answer any homeowner's questions.

BARBEQUE•RAFFLE•DEMOS•FAMILY FUN

BEGIN TREATING FOR FIRE ANTS IN EARLY SPRING

For people who enjoy the warm months outdoors, few things are as frustrating as the presence of fire ants. After all, it's your yard and not being able to let your pets out or have the kids play in the back yard without being stung can be maddening.

Scientists continue to research new ways to fight the problem. Promising research on phorid flies, a natural enemy of the fire ants native to South America, has shown the flies will kill fire ants and limit population growth. However, a natural U.S. population will take years to develop, and even as the fly populations



grow, experts estimate they will only slow the spread of the ants, not eliminate them.

"With the natural fluctuations in fire ant populations due to weather and other factors, it makes it difficult to determine the exact effect of phorid flies," says Dr. Charles Barr, an extension program specialist for the Texas

Cooperative Extension. "We have only a fraction of the phorid fly species here compared to what the fire ants deal with in South America, where there are some 20 different species. I think the best we can expect is a reduction in the population by a small percentage."

For homeowners, the most practical and effective method to control fire ant infestations remains a broadcast granular

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insecticide spread with a fertilizer spreader and watered in after application. Granular applications such as fipronil provide season-long control with only one application.

“For areas where complete control of fire ants is a priority, fipronil is one of the better weapons we have in the arsenal,” says Bart Drees, Texas fire ant project director at Texas A&M University in College Station. “More conventional bait products make sense for larger areas such as pasture, where some level of control is necessary but human traffic is not as high.”



Baits must be applied to mounds as they appear so you typically will treat for fire ants six to 12 times each year. The efficacy of baits can be damaged by high temperatures, high humidity, and intense sunlight so they must be kept in a dark and cool location. If using a bait do not apply it within six hours of rain or heavy dew.

“Sometimes people see fire ants moving around and assume it is a good time to apply a bait product,” says Wayne Smith, integrated pest management educator, special projects, at Oklahoma State University in Durant. “However, if the ants you have seen are out building or relocating to a new colony, the bait will be ineffective. Place a little food near the mound — corn chips work well — and wait 30 minutes. If

you see ants out feeding on the chips, it’s a good time to apply a bait product.”

Fire ants pick up fipronil on contact and do not require foraging ants to be effective, although foraging does make for a good time to apply the product.

“That’s one advantage fipronil has,” says Smith. “It provides control, regardless of when it is applied. Because the ants pick it up unintentionally and it works on contact, they will pick it up during any sort of activity.”

Another option for treating fire ants is drenching, which requires a homeowner to dilute an insecticide with water and allow it

to drip into the ground. It is most effective in temperatures between 70 and 85 degrees Fahrenheit, and because fire ants tend to burrow deep underground in the hot summer months, drenching is most effective during late spring or early fall, depending on the temperature.



FIREANTECDOTES

Each month, *Managing Fire Ants* will feature an interesting or unusual story about an experience with fire ants, straight from the experts who deal with them every day. If you have a “Fire ANTEcdote” of your own, please email it to bugs@armentdietrich.com.

Dr. Charles Barr
Professor and extension entomologist
Texas A&M University

One morning I got up and walked into our living room with the paper. My wife said, “I saved them for you.”

“Huh?” I replied.

“Just look in the kitchen.”

I walked into the kitchen and there, in the middle of the room, 10 feet from the nearest exterior wall, a very impressive feeding trail led from a joint in the floor tile to our cat food bowls. Like any good professional involved in pest control, I instantly became a typical homeowner, grabbed a can of Raid, and hosed down the trail. That afternoon, I remembered what I did for a living, treated outdoors with a bait, and never had another problem indoors.

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

For more information, please contact Alex Parker at (312) 787-7249 or bugs@armentdietrich.com.

EXPERT TIP OF THE MONTH

Dr. Bart Drees
Professor and extension entomologist
Texas A&M University

Beware of fire ants indoors

During periods of excessive dry conditions, flooding, or even for no apparent reason, entire imported fire ant colonies will suddenly migrate indoors — presumably in search of better nesting conditions or resources. They can enter through the smallest cracks and will bring with them the queen(s) and brood (eggs, larvae, and pupae) and even construct their mounds by bringing up soil from underneath the slab or by nesting in rotting structural timbers.

The best way to avoid these incursions is to eliminate colonies outdoors – before the ants migrate indoors. One suggestion is to apply granular fipronil to the landscape around structures in order to eliminate colonies. With fipronil, and other low-dose formulations of the active ingredient, the entire lawn area needs to be treated as directed. These products are not best used as a narrow (five to 10 feet) barrier because the ingredient is slow-acting and non-repellent. Colonies nesting within the treated area are typically eliminated within four to six weeks.