

## Control Fire Ants in the Lawn

If you have ever been stung by fire ants, you are probably watchful for mounds showing up in your yard. Fire ants are dreaded for their painful, burning stings that result in pustules. These pustules can persist for up to ten days and, if broken, can harbor infections. The itch that accompanies the sting is intense and relentless. Fire ants will attack anything that disturbs their nest including your pets, livestock and wildlife. Nothing is spared when they are defending the nest from an intruder.

Imported fire ants are aggressive, reddish brown to black, and usually about 1/8 inch long. They live in dome-shaped mounds of soil built in sunny and open areas. This makes our lawns and gardens a prime location for mounds. Sometimes they may also build in rotting logs, around trees, or under pavement and buildings. The mounds are home to colonies of ants, including immature cream-colored ants, eggs and larvae. A single queen in an established colony can lay over 2,000 eggs per day.

The workers go out and forage for food to feed everyone back home. They scout around and report to other workers when a food source is located. These expeditions can take them as far away as one hundred feet from the nest. They forage during the day and night, whenever the temperatures are between 70 and 90 degrees F.

The really bad news is it impossible to completely control fire ants. Fire ants often come back with more of a vengeance after they have been treated. Native ant species are also reduced or eliminated when treatments are made on fire ants. So when the fire ant returns, they go into a rapid reproductive mode so they will outcompete other ant species. If you don't keep up with an ant control plan, the reinfestation will usually be even greater than before you waged war.

The good news is that there are several reliable control strategies that you can use to treat your lawn and garden areas. Four strategies that are currently recommended are broadcast bait applications, individual mound treatments, a combination of the first two, and barrier/spot treatments. Some people claim success with carefully pouring boiling water onto the mound. You can also try digging the mounds on a cool, sunny morning and taking them somewhere else. Use common sense, however, and don't attempt any home remedies that are dangerous or contaminate the environment.

Baits are products containing insecticides that are released slowly. Foraging ants bring the bait back and feed it to the others in the colony before they die. Baits should be fresh, dry and applied when ants are actively foraging. Broadcasting is done over an area when no rain is expected for at least 24 hours. This should efficiently reduce the fire ant population. For more control, you can wait several days and then treat the individual mounds with a dust, drench, granular or aerosol insecticide specifically labeled for fire ants. Always follow the directions on the label for best results and for the safety of your family.

But that's not the end of the story. They'll be back...

For more on fire ant control visit <http://solutionsforyourlife.com> or call the UF Master Gardeners on Tuesday or Thursday mornings at 386-752-5384.

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) is an Equal Employment Opportunity – Affirmative Action Employer authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function with non-discrimination with respect to race, creed, color, religion, age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, political opinions or affiliations. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Florida, IFAS, Florida A. & M. University Cooperative Extension Program, and Boards of County Commissioners Cooperating.