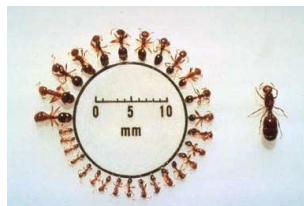


Fire Ants!

Solenopsis invicta

Fire ants actually sting and do not bite. They inject venom into the victim from the abdomen whereas other ants actually bite and spray acid on the wound. These ants use their mouths only to get a grip on the target. This venom contains a toxic alkaloid called Solenopsin, which results in a painful sting for humans that is similar to the feeling of being burned by fire, thus the common name.

These ants are not the giant ants you see in the movies. They actually are not very large at all. The photo below should help you get an idea of their actual size. They are a very small insect with a very big sting!



Fire ants arrived in the United States in 1918, hitching a ride in cargo arriving from South America. There are over 280 species of fire ants throughout the world, and go by several different names. They are different in color than other ants, their heads are copper, and the abdomen appears dark brown. They range in size from 0.12 to 0.24 mm and will all be found in the same nest, although the queen is the largest in the colony. Fire ants sometimes have five or more queens in a nest, depending on the size of the colony. Her main function, to lay eggs! A queen can lay almost two thousand eggs per day and she herself may live up to seven years.

The Fire ant we commonly see, the *Solenopsis invicta*, commonly called the Red Imported Fire Ant, (R.I.F.A.) is the one that bothers people and is a huge problem in not only the United States, but other countries as well. Luckily, other species are not invasive due to biological factors.

What Defense do we have against Fire ants?

The application of a bait product reduces populations when broadcasted. They may not reduce it completely, but close to the eighty percent mark. It is best to treat later in the afternoon or in the evening when the ants come out to forage. Application in fall works well to repress populations that really take off in spring.

Scientists have been experimenting with the parasitic South American native Phorid fly. These tiny flies look like fruit flies and are known for eventually decapitating the ant. These little guys lay eggs by dive bombing the ant's body. The maggots migrate to the ant's head, and begin to consume both the muscle and nervous tissue in the head, which of course includes the brain. After two weeks or so, the ant's head will then fall off as an enzyme is emitted that dissolves the membrane holding the head on to the body. After the fly pupates in the head which acts as its own private nursery, it makes its way out as an adult fly, to lay more eggs. Although we truly may be years away from being able to use it as a biological control agent, the reality is there.

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