

## COMMUNITY INFORMATION Fire Ant Control Options

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Red Imported Fire Ants were brought to the US in the soil ballast of a ship from South America in 1929 in Mobile, AL. They are now found as far west as California and as far north as Kansas and Maryland. They are extremely aggressive and voracious causing hundreds of millions of dollars in personal and property damage per year in the US and will displace native ants, insects and ground dwelling wildlife. They can not be eradicated, but there are several ways of keeping them in check. Please keep in mind that treating Fire Ants is an ongoing battle that requires persistence over a long period of time, there is no "overnight" solution that will get rid of them forever.

I'll first talk about some "home remedies" that are out there. These include putting grits on the mounds, pouring gasoline on them, or even using boiling water or attempting to "drown" the ants with a garden hose. The facts are that none of those "home remedies" will work effectively. Grits will do nothing but feed the ants, gasoline is illegal to pour in the ground and will contaminate groundwater and kill the turf, and boiling water will also kill turf and simply make the ants move a few feet away. Garden hoses are ineffective as Fire Ants can live underwater for up to 14 days. Fire Ants can have tunnels as deep as 3 to 4 feet that extend out for over 100 feet and when sensing something is wrong will simply retreat deep into the ground. Most "home remedy" type methods do nothing but make the ants relocate a few feet away.

There are a few methods that we have found to be effective at controlling Fire Ants. For any control method to be effective, the queen of the colony must be killed. The first method is baiting the mounds. There are many commercially available baits such as Amdro, Maxforce, Extinguish, etc. These are baits that are sprinkled around the mound which the ants gather and bring back into the colony as food. They take 3 to 6 weeks to kill the ants and are about 80% effective, as there is no guarantee the Queen will eat the bait. In established colonies, Fire Ants have been noted to "test out" new food sources on their workers first to ensure they are safe before allowing the Queen to eat it. For this reason, repeat treatments are often necessary with bait products. Baits may also be broadcast over a large area to attempt to prevent new colonies from forming, and these broadcast treatments must be repeated on a regular basis. The big thing to remember about baits is they take a long time to work and are best at controlling small or new mounds.

There are also several non bait chemical broadcast or single mound drench methods available to homeowners to control ants. These include products with the main ingredients of "Carbaryl" (Sevin), "Acephate" (Orthene), "Indoxacarb" (Spectracide), or "Pyrethroids" (Bayer Advanced) among many others and are readily available at Hardware and Big Box type stores. These products will provide an immediate kill of all ants they come in contact with in a matter of hours or days but provide little in the way of residual control. Within a matter of a few weeks, ants will be able to re-colonize the treated areas from neighboring sites that were not treated. Repeat applications of those products must be made on a regular basis to maintain an acceptable level of control. Simply follow label directions for whatever product you select.

There are also 2 main products that are listed as "restricted use" and are available only to licensed lawn care and pest control professionals to provide broadcast control of Fire Ants over a large area. The first and cheapest method is a set of products that contain the active ingredient "Bifenthrin" and go by the names "Cross-Check" and "Talstar". They provide an immediate kill of the ants but provide little in the way of residual control. Ants may re-colonize the treated areas in a matter of weeks. The second, newest, more expensive and in our opinion best control product contains the main ingredient "Fipronil" and goes by the Name TopChoice. That product takes 2 to 4 weeks to kill the ants in the treated area but provides 12 months of residual control. It's new technology that uses a very low dose of the active ingredient to kill a very specific pest (in this case Fire Ants). More information on Fipronil and TopChoice and how they

are superior to other methods of Fire Ant control can be found at <http://www.pestproducts.com/top-choice.htm>

Thanks,

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