

Fire! Ants in My Landscape

As an extension agent, one of my frequently ask question is; how do I get rid of fire ants? Homeowners often apply various insecticides on ant mounds and the ants just keep moving to different locations in the yard. Not all insecticides are created equal; although the product might say it will control fire ants, it does not mean it will kill the entire mound by making one application. One insecticide may be more potent and get the job done quicker than the other.

Fire ants are not prevalent year round. Fire ants love warm humid temperature with the presence of moist soil which means that they are very active in the spring and summer months. Homeowners see fire ants as a big deal because when bitten by them, they inflict pain, cause swelling, and redness of the skin. These tiny creatures know how to spoil outdoor fun.

The fact is fire ants do not fight for their turf. This peaceful and sociable behavior allows one mound to have more than one queen and each queen can lay up to 1,000 eggs per day. This means that if you are not quick with your control strategy, they will establish mounds all over the landscape. My experience with fire ants is that they can be found in vegetable beds, flower pots, cracks of concrete, and in mulch.

How to control fire ants? There are various fire ants baits available to homeowners at local garden centers. Getting rid of fire ants should be a coordinated effort with your neighbor. Fire ants cross fence lines, especially during mating flight after a rain event. If you are treating your yard and your neighbors are not treating theirs, then ants will keep crossing the borders back into your yard. Controlling fire ants is not an overnight fix: it sometimes takes a two-step approach. Broadcast granular bait over the entire landscape and then treat the individual mound. Baits are pesticide. These baits, taken by the workers ants to the colony, are shared with the queen who later dies or become sterile. Expecting a one application fix could mean that you would have to hire a Pest Management Professional who have access to very potent insecticides such as fipronil. To be safe, always remember to read the label before applying pesticides.

For more information on landscaping and other related horticulture topics, contact Grantly Ricketts with UF/IFAS Extension in Osceola County at 321-697-3000 or email gricketts@ufl.edu