

Background

The Red Imported Fire Ant (RIFA) has recently been found in California. Known for its aggressive behavior, this ant can interfere with outdoor activities and harm native wildlife.

Fire ant mounds are unsightly, detract from the aesthetic value of home landscaping and may reduce land values.

The RIFA can be a nuisance, and can threaten those who may knowingly or unknowingly disturb their colony.

The ants are an established pest in 11 southeastern states, including: Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, and adjacent regions in North Carolina, Arkansas, Tennessee and Oklahoma.



Where They Infest

The ants build mounds in almost any type of soil, but prefer open, sunny areas such as pastures, parks, lawns, meadows and cultivated fields.

Homes and Buildings – Fire ants form colonies close to homes and other buildings. They sometimes forage indoors for food and moisture, particularly during the hot, dry summer months. Entire colonies occasionally nest in wall voids or rafters, sometimes moving into buildings during floods.

They also nest under cracked pavement, removing dirt from underneath sidewalks and roadways and aggravating structural problems. Colonies in these sites may be difficult to locate.

Home Gardens – The ants occasionally feed on vegetable plants in home gardens. The worst damage usually occurs during hot, dry weather. Ants may also be a nuisance to gardeners during

weeding and harvesting. Fire ants invade compost piles and mulched flower beds seeking warmth and moisture.

Electrical Equipment and Utility Housings

– Like many other ants, fire ants frequently infest electrical equipment. They chew on insulation and can cause short circuits or interfere with switching mechanisms.

Air conditioners, traffic signal boxes, and other devices can be damaged. Fire ants also nest in housings around electrical and utility units. The ants move soil into these structures, which causes shorting and other mechanical problems.



Around Bodies of Water – Fire ants require water to survive and are often found near creeks, run-off ditches, streams, rivers, ponds, lakes and other bodies of water. If surface water is unavailable, they may tunnel down to the ground water table many feet below ground.

Fire Ant Biology

Fire ant mounds can reach 18 inches in height, depending upon the type of soil. Often mounds are located in rotting logs, and around stumps and trees. Colonies can also be found in or under buildings.

The average colony contains 100,000 to 500,000 workers and up to several hundred winged ants and queens.

Queen ants can live seven years or more, while worker ants generally live about five weeks, although they can survive much longer.

The winged ants live in the mound until their mating flight, which usually occurs in the afternoon, following a rainy period. Mating flights are most common in the spring and fall.



Males die soon after mating, while the fertilized queen begins

looking for a suitable nesting site, sheds her wings, and begins digging a chamber in which to start a new colony. Sometimes several queens can be found in a single nesting site.

Colonies frequently migrate from one site to another. The queen needs only about six workers to start a new colony. They can develop a new mound, several hundred feet away from their previous location, almost overnight.

For more information on the Red Imported Fire Ant, please visit the CDFA Website:

www.cdfa.ca.gov

Telephone Numbers:

Pest Hotline 800-491-1899

CDFA Consumer Line 800-675-2427



Prepared by:
California Department of Food & Agriculture
Office of Public Affairs