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Red imported fire ants were introduced into Mobile, Alabama in the 1930s from Brazil in shipments, and have spread throughout the southern US through grass and woody ornamentals used in landscapes. These ants have a high reproductive rate, which allows for them to spread naturally into new areas.

Stepping on a fire ant mound is inevitable when walking in an infested area. These ants are aggressive and they are capable of stinging multiple times. They can cover their disturber without notice, and then a pheromone is sent out that causes them to sting at one time. A fire ant's venom is injected by its stinger and causes the burning sensation. Itching and burning sensations are most apparent within the first 60 minutes after the sting. Some people have allergic reactions to the stings, such as hives, swelling, nausea, and shock. Death has even occurred due to hypersensitivity.

Before treating for fire ants, homeowners first need to survey the area to determine the number of mounds within their yards. If more than 5 mounds are present in a quarter acre plot, then it is time to treat. Next the homeowner should test for foraging activity. In order to test for foraging activity, place a potato chip or hot dog next to the mound. If fire ants find the chip or hot dog in thirty minutes, this means they are actively foraging. Fire ants will typically forage when the soil surface temperature is between 70 and 90° F. If the fire ants are actively foraging, then it is time to implement the Texas Two Step Method. The Texas Two Step Method is designed to control fire ants in and around yards. This plan follows an integrated pest management approach that involves minimal risk to people, pets, and the overall environment when properly executed. The most effective way to implement this program is to get the whole neighborhood involved and have "block party." This will save on costs and improve control, since there is a smaller chance of reinfestation in adjoining yards that have been treated. I would be happy to assist in implementing this program, once a block has decided on a specific date and time to treat their yards.

The **first step** of the Texas Two Step Program is to **broadcast a fire ant bait**. Before applying the fire ant bait, foraging activity must be detected. Once foraging activity is detected, the bait should be broadcast over the **entire** yard in the fall and spring. The bait should be applied all over the yard using a hand-held seed spreader. Fire ant bait is a product containing both a food source and an insecticide. This bait is collected by worker ants and carried back to the colony to be shared with the queen and other ants. The delivery process of baits into the colony is so effective, that the amount of pesticides applied in an area is significantly reduced. Homeowner should use only fresh bait products in their yards, since fire ants will not pick up the bait if it smells rancid. Also, homeowners should be patient, since baits work slowly.

Some of the organic baits on the market that are listed by the Organic Materials Review Institute are Safer Brand® Fire Ant Bait and Green Light® Fire Ant Control with Conserve. These products contain the active ingredient **spinosad**. There are also products containing **hydramethylnon** and insect growth regulators, such as **fenoxy carb** and **methoprene**. The advantage with IGRs is they do not have to be applied as often, but they will take a longer time to control the insects.

The **second step** of the Texas Two Step Program is to **treat the individual mounds**. The mound treatment is the fastest way to get rid of the fire ant mounds, but it is more labor intensive and more costly to apply when compared to the broadcast baits. Therefore, step two should be limited to those mounds found around the foundation and in high traffic areas.

An organic individual mound drench that is listed by Organic Materials Review Institute is Safer® Brand Fire Ant Mound Drench containing **d-limonene**. Other mound treatment products contain synthetic pyrethroids such as **cyfluthrin**, **deltamethrin**, and **permethrin**.

Before applying any type of pesticide, always be sure to read and follow the pesticide label. Also, never use harmful toxins, such as gasoline to control fire ants. These products are illegal and dangerous. Also never leave insecticide baits on streets or walkways after application, in order to avoid unnecessary entrance into the water supply.

I would be pleased to assist in implementing the Texas Two Step within your neighborhood, once a block decides on a date and time to treat their yards.

If you would like additional information, please contact Kimberly Engler at 972-952-9221 or k-engler@tamu.edu or visit the fire ant webpage at www.fireant.tamu.edu.