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Remember to Treat for Fire Ants This Fall

Even though we have been experiencing high temperatures, fire ants are unfortunately still in the area. They can live deep within the soil so their mounds may not always be visible. Since they are a medically important insect pest, control measures should be taken in some cases to decrease their populations.

Before treating for fire ants, one must first survey the area to determine the number of mounds, if possible. If less than 5 mounds are present in a quarter acre plot, then it is advised to treat the individual mounds. Treating individual mounds 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.

If more than 5 mounds are present, then treatment should be broadcasted over the entire area. A fire ant bait or contact insecticide may be used. Fire ant baits are made up of defatted corn grit covered with insecticide and soybean oil. Before broadcasting the fire ant bait, foraging activity should be evaluated. 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 within fifteen minutes, then it is an appropriate time to broadcast the fire ant bait. Fire ants will typically actively forage when the soil surface temperature is between 70 and 90° F. The delivery process of fire ant baits into the colony is so effective, that the amount of insecticide applied in an area is significantly reduced. Fire ant baits should never be watered into the soil and they should not be used if they smell rancid. Contact insecticides can also be broadcasted over the entire area and these need to be watered into the soil. One contact insecticide containing fipronil can be used for fire ant control and will usually provide 9 to 12 months control.

Both fire ant baits and contact insecticides can be broadcast using a hand-held spreader for small areas or a Herd Seeder can be mounted onto a truck or ATV for larger areas.

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. In addition, never leave insecticide baits on streets or walkways after application, in order to avoid unnecessary entrance into the water supply.

For more information, please visit the fire ant webpage at <http://fireant.tamu.edu>.



Red imported fire ant worker. Photo by Dr. Bart Drees, Professor and Extension Entomologist, Texas A&M University.

Mention of commercial products is for educational purposes only and does not represent endorsement by Texas AgriLife Extension or The Texas A&M University System. Insecticide label registrations are subject to change, and changes may have occurred since this publication was printed. The pesticide user is always responsible for applying products in accordance with label directions. Always read and carefully follow the instructions on the container label.