

# Red Imported Fire Ant

## TREE DOCTOR TIPS | LAWN

### Red Imported Fire Ant (*Solenopsis invicta*)

#### DESCRIPTION:

The red imported fire ant is an invasive species that inhabits lawns, pastures, fields and roadsides to create lumpy soil mounds. They are known to sting people and animals which can be quite painful.

#### HOSTS:

The red imported fire ant can affect residential lawn areas and public areas such as parks and playgrounds. The pest typically affects lawns in southern states ranging from North Carolina to Texas and has also been found in areas of California.

#### BIOLOGY AND SYMPTOMS:

The queen fire ant will choose a nesting spot in an open, sunny area to lay eggs and create a colony. A colony can contain as many as 500,000 ants after three years. The ants tunnel under grass to create mounds that pile up above ground. Stepping on or otherwise disturbing the mounds prompts the ants to sting the culprit. This creates a burning sensation, and later, a blister.

#### MANAGEMENT:

Red imported fire ant colonies can be controlled in several ways. Effective DIY methods include drenching the mounds in boiled water or lining mounds with fire ant baits. To eliminate with water, boil at least 3 gallons of water to about 200°F and slowly pour the water on top of the mound. This method would not be practical in areas with flowers, turfgrass or plants nearby, as the scorching water may harm the plants. As

an alternate option, apply fire ant baits around the perimeter of a mound taking extra precaution not to touch or disturb it. If neither method is suitable, talk to a professional arborist about treatment. After treatment, avoid a new infestation by inspecting lawns in open areas yearly and making sure newly purchased plants are free of fire ant activity.



A



B

FIGURE A. FIRE ANT MOUND

FIGURE B. STING FROM A FIRE ANT, CLOSE-UP

*The scientists at **The Davey Institute** laboratory and research facility support our arborists and technicians in diagnosing and prescribing based on the latest arboricultural science. For specific treatment and application details, your arborist may consult *The Davey Institute PHC Handbook*.*

