

## The Do's and Don'ts of Fire Ant Control

Fire Ants are once again beginning to make an appearance here in Pontotoc Co. and with some of the rains and warm temperatures many people are beginning to see the mounds appear in their lawn or pasture. We are never going to be able to eliminate fire ants from our area so the best we can do is try to manage them the best we can.

### When Treating Individual Mounds:

- Take care to disturb the mound as little as possible when applying dusts or granules. Stirring the soil or poking holes in the mound, or otherwise provoking the ants may cause the ants to move therefore reducing control and increase the likelihood of painful and often harmful stings.
- Use only the pesticides that are labeled for fire ants. Many products that target fire ants have important information on them regarding the timing of treatment, which is critical for achieving satisfactory control. Do not use household products, they may kill individual workers but will not eliminate entire colonies as effectively as those products that are labeled for fire ant control.
- Make sure to apply pesticides according to the labeled rates. Taking shortcuts or applying the bait before you read the directions may result in decreased control or increased expense. Each product comes with its own specialized instructions for application. Some products are not labeled for application in certain areas, while others may have to be watered into the soil. If these products are not used they will not work properly and may be taken off of the market because of misuse.
- Place bait products around the mounds, a short distance (2-3 feet) from the mound's edge where the foraging ants will discover the baits quickly, resulting in better control. Baits placed on top of the mound will be moved into a pile by worker ants rendering the bait useless.
- Fire ants are commonly found in electrical or utility boxes on your property where they can do extensive damage. If you find fire ants in these areas contact your utility company or a licensed pest control operator to remove them. Do not try to control fire ants located in utility boxes yourself because you put yourself at risk of being severely injured.
- Treat mounds individually on sunny mornings after cool nights. In the morning hours, the ants will be located close to the upper surface of the mound, making contact insecticides more effective. Do not treat mounds when it is extremely hot or cold outside because ants will be located deep in the mound making contact insecticides of little value.

### When broadcasting bait formulations:

- Monitor for activity by using a corn chip or hot dog slice. Place the bait on the ground and come back and check it in 10 to 15 minutes if there are ants on the bait it is a good time to apply baited products because the ants are actively feeding.
- Apply when soil temperature is between 70 and 90 degrees F. Do not apply when it is too hot or cold or there is heavy dew on the grass.

- Apply baits when the ground is relatively dry and no rain is expected for 24 hours. Do not apply right after or right before a rain because the moisture will dilute the active ingredient in the insecticide to the point that it will not work.
- Allow the insecticide time to work. This may take from 2 to 6 weeks so just be patient. Don't disturb the mounds checking to see if they are still there this will only slow down the process.
- Make sure and use fresh products when controlling fire ants. Thoroughly shake the bait container before opening; this will prevent the oil attractant from settling out. Bait that is older than 3 months should be discarded because the oil attractant will quickly become rancid or dry out and then it will be less attractive to the ants.
- Use recommended methods of broadcasting fire ant baits. Hand held seed spreaders and some brands of tractor-mounted seed spreaders work very well for distributing fire ant baits. Do not mix baits with fertilizers because this will decrease the attractiveness of the bait.

Finally:

Do not use gasoline, diesel fuel, motor oil, bleach or other household cleaners, or other "home remedies" to combat fire ants. These products are generally ineffective, can cause serious damage to lawns, and are harmful to the environment. They are also costly, compared to insecticides!

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