

Pest of the Month **Fire Ants**



Imported fire ant mound



Pustules from fire ant stings



Fire ant larvae



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Fire Ant Biology 101 and History 101

We all love to kick over fire ant mounds to watch them boil out. We watch in delight knowing that they will have to work hard to rebuild their mound. Serves them right for all the pain and agony they put us through!

Well, warm weather is here and just as the trees have started their budding, the fire ants have started their building. As the weather continues to warm up, you will really begin to see some fire ant activity. When it is cool, they like to build mounds near sidewalks or slabs presumably for the warmth. I have already seen two mounds appear in my yard seemingly overnight. As I am sure you well know, fire ants are a problem because of their painful stings and because their mounds can damage turf and lawn equipment.

Imported fire ants, *Solenopsis* spp., or more commonly, fire ants, are not native to the United States. These ants were accidentally introduced into the U. S. in ships traveling from South America to the Port of Mobile sometime in the 1930's. They were first documented in the United States in Mobile, Alabama and have now moved across the Southeastern U. S. westward and into California. Fire ants will hunt for living insects and will also feed on dead animals. They may forage into buildings for sweets, proteins and fats and may even seek out dirty laundry to feed on body oils. Fire ants generally nest outdoors, but have been known to form a nest where there is a food source, such as a box of unwrapped candy on the floor. These highly aggressive ants can usually be seen in trails going to and from a food source. The foragers come in multiple body sizes and are known as "majors" and "minors". If you suspect that fire ants are in your home or classroom, but are unsure, look for these characteristics:

-  A trail of medium sized reddish to blackish colored ants
-  Worker ants of many different body sizes
-  A nearby mound or nest (usually outside)



What to do if you see ants trailing in your classroom

First of all, the kind of ants you have should be accurately identified to see if they pose an immediate threat to you and/or

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your students. Secondly, the reason the ants are trailing inside should be identified. There is usually a good reason why ants are trailing inside. See if you can follow the ant trail to a food source. Many times, there is a half eaten candy bar hidden in a desk, cracker crumbs on the floor or spilled drink syrup in the bottom of a trash can that is acting as the attractant. You can usually remove the food source and the ants will naturally return outside. If the trash can is the culprit, be sure to wash it out before returning it to the classroom. Even a little food/drink residue can feed ants for a long time. If food is common in the classroom, be sure that it is stored in plastic containers with snap-tight lids that seal tightly. To further cleanup potential food sources, one idea is to have weekly clean-out sessions where students remove any debris from their desks, lockers, and backpacks.

You may also want to clean the area where the ants were trailing with soapy water so the chemical trail the ants are following is removed. If the soapy water contacts the ants, they will become immobilized and can be wiped up and discarded. You will need to be careful when removing ants to reduce the chance of being stung.

Be sure to report the ants by filling out the pest sighting log in the front office. Your Pest Management Professional needs to know



Fire ant worker

about the problem, especially if the ants are fire ants. He can locate the ant mound and take care of the problem at the source. If you

suspect that your ant problem is fire ants, you will want to act quickly and carefully so that the ants can be managed before anyone is stung.



Mystery of the Month

The mystery of the month for April is a question.

Do fire ants bite or sting?



Answer: Fire ants bite AND sting!

Many people say that they have ant *bites* when they have actually been *stung* by fire ants. You might be surprised to find out that fire ants do *both*, bite and sting. They bite the flesh with their mandibles in order to gain leverage to inject their venom with their stinger. The result is a white pustule that appears within 24 hours of the sting. *Ouch!* and *Double Ouch!*



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*Few bugs are bad!
More than 95% of all insect
species are beneficial to humans.*

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