



Pest Press



“ I P M – I T ’ S T H E R I G H T T H I N G T O D O . ”

IMPORTED FIRE ANTS

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

Warm weather is here and just as the trees have started budding, the fire ants have started building. As the weather continues to warm up, you will really begin to see some fire ant activity. 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.

Fire ants will build their mounds almost anywhere—in the open or next to a building, tree, sidewalk or electrical box. A fire ant mound does not have a central opening. Fire ants emerge quickly and begin biting and stinging when the mound is disturbed.

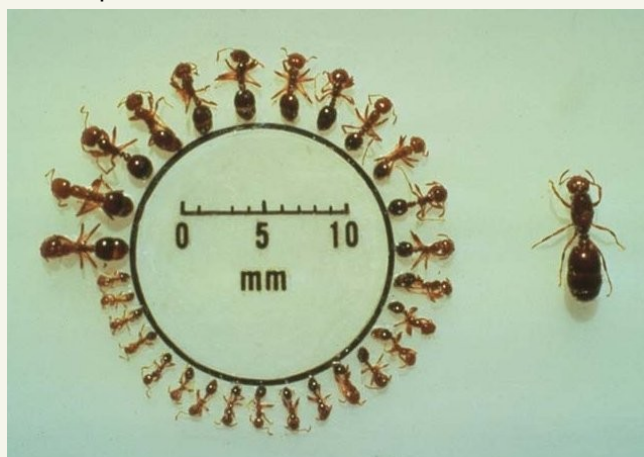
Worker fire ants are reddish-brown to almost black in color, and are about 1/16 to about 1/4 inch long. Fire ants are similar in appearance to many other ants, so make sure you correctly identify the species.

Imported fire ants, *Solenopsis* spp., or more commonly fire ants, are not native to the United States. They were accidentally introduced through the Port of Mobile in the 1930's on ships traveling from South America, thus the name “imported” fire ants. Today, fire ants have spread to cover most of the Southeastern United States, much of Texas and parts of California. There are two species of imported fire ant that have established in the United States the Red Imported Fire Ant, *Solenopsis invicta* Buren, and the Black Imported Fire Ant, *Solenopsis rickerti* Forel. These two fire ants have crossed and have created a hybrid species. All three species are considered invasive insects whose stings can cause serious medical problems to some individuals.

What should you 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 are an immediate threat to you and/or your students. Trailing

fire ants are easily identifiable because they are the only ant species in the United States whose workers differ in size. So, if your trailing ants have a mixture between small, medium and large size ants, you know you have fire ants.

Then you should discover the reason the ants are trailing inside. Try and follow the 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.

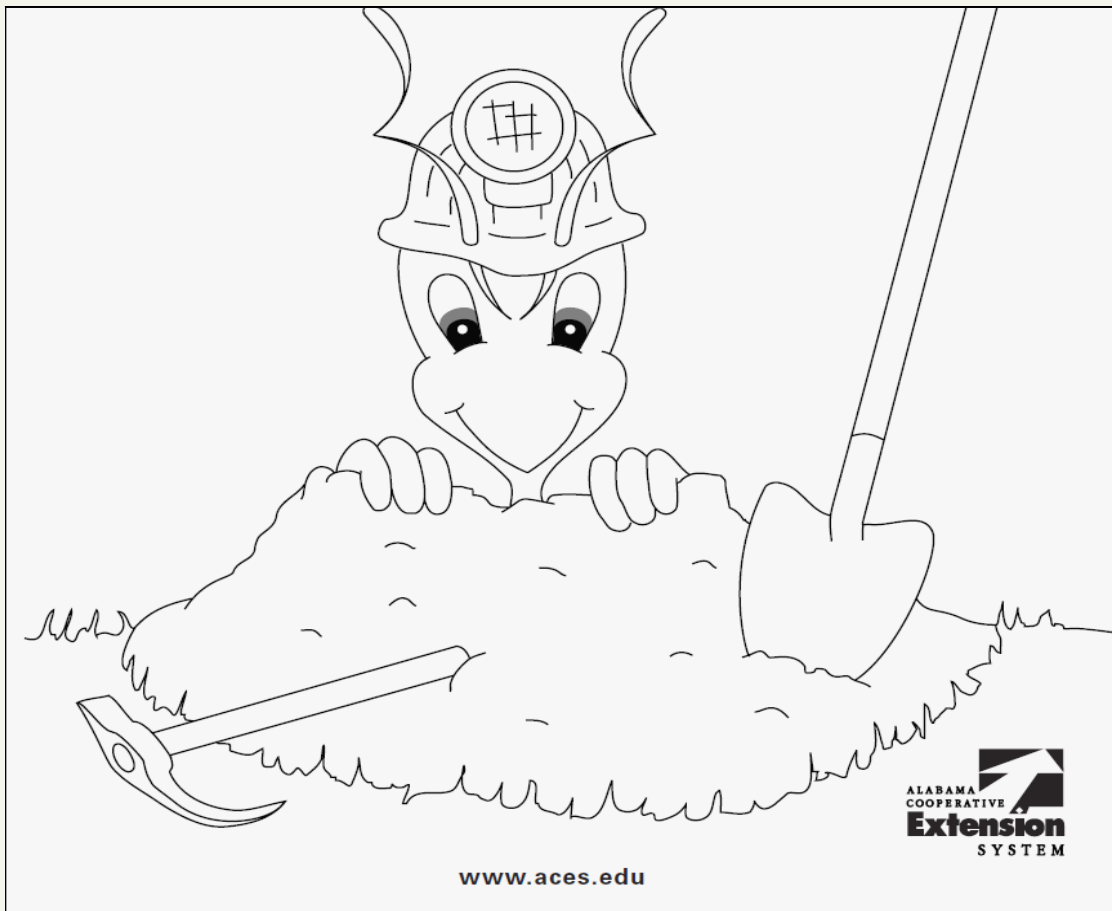
Although fire ants do prey on flea larvae, chinch bugs, cockroach eggs, ticks, and other pests, the problems they cause usually outweigh any benefits in urban areas. While it's impossible to totally eradicate fire ants, managing them is highly desirable. The best management programs use a combination of non-chemical and chemical methods that are effective, economical, and least harmful to the environment.

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

All of this information was taken from the [eXtension.org/fire+ants](http://extension.org/fire+ants) website. You can find all of this information there and more on fire ants and fire ant management. There is also a lot of interesting information that can be found under Youth Content, such as this coloring book.



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The link to our Fire Ant Coloring book: <http://www.aces.edu/pubs/docs/A/ANR-1185/ANR-1185.pdf>