

Red Imported Fire Ants

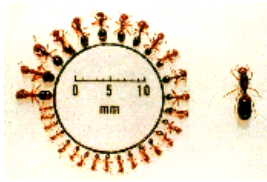
What are Red Imported Fire Ants?

Red Imported Fire Ants (RIFA) are insects. They have an aggressive nature, painful stings and have begun to infest California. Already, these tiny but destructive creatures have been found in a number of Southern California and Central Valley counties and are expected to spread even further.

How did Red Imported Fire Ants come to California?

Red Imported Fire Ants are called “imported” because they are not native to this country. It is believed that they came to the United States from South America aboard cargo ships that docked in Mobile, Alabama, in the 1930’s. Today, fire ants infest more than 300 million acres in fifteen states across the southern United States, as well as Puerto Rico.

In 1997, RIFA was found in California. Recent infestations of RIFA are centered on the cities of Azusa and Cerritos.



Size range of Red Imported Fire Ant

What do Red Imported Fire Ants look like?

Red Imported Fire Ants are very small, ranging from approximately one-eighth to one-fourth inch. The ant’s body coloring is reddish-brown in color, with a dark brown abdomen. They are different from most ants commonly found in California, but you can’t distinguish them from other ants just by looking at them.

Where do Red Imported Fire Ants live?



Red Imported Fire Ant Mound

Red Imported Fire Ants live underground and can be distinguished by the type of

mounds they build in lawns and other landscaped areas.

The mounds appear as small piles of fine soil with small holes. These mounds can eventually resemble large gopher mounds that are often 18 inches across or larger. Red Imported Fire Ants also are attracted to electrical equipment and can be found in electrical boxes, such as outdoor sprinkler systems, airport lights, swimming pool pumps and air conditioning units.



Why are Red Imported Fire Ants threatening?

Red Imported Fire Ants have fierce stings that leave victims with painful, itchy welts. In some rare cases, stings from Red Imported Fire Ants can even kill people who are allergic to their venom.

Red Imported Fire Ants also are a threat to wildlife and agriculture. They attack and kill pets and wildlife, such as quail, lizards, squirrels, and baby deer. They also attack agricultural workers, compete with beneficial insects and devour important crops such as citrus, strawberries, and corn.

The threat to people and animals is another factor that distinguishes Red Imported Fire Ants from other ants. Other types of ants – both imported and native – pose no threat to people or to wildlife, other than being a nuisance.

How do Red Imported Fire Ants attack?

Red Imported Fire Ants attack when their nests are disturbed, usually when a person or animal inadvertently steps on the ant mound. Attracted by

movement, the insects swarm onto people or animals before they even realize an attack is underway. Then the ants begin to sting, injecting venom that feels like a poke with a hot needle. Because each ant can sting numerous times, the victim can receive many more stings than there are ants. Each sting will hurt for about an hour and forms a blister-like sore filled with fluid. More than half of those stung by Red Imported Fire Ants develop reactions when they have been stung that include swelling, itching, redness, and pain that lasts for several days. But for some people – maybe two out of ten – the ant venom could be potentially life-threatening. Symptoms are similar to those suffered by people allergic to bee stings: severe swelling, shortness of breath, dizziness, nausea, headache, and profuse sweating. People who experience an allergic reaction should seek medical attention.

How do you treat a Red Imported Fire Ant sting?

- Elevate the extremity and apply ice or a cold compress to reduce swelling and relieve pain and itching.
- Wash the affected area with soap and water to help prevent secondary infection.
- Keep the blisters clean and avoid scratching to help reduce the chance of infection and scarring.
- Apply a topical ointment containing steroids and/or take an oral antihistamine to relieve the itching.

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- Seek medical attention if the swelling progresses, if the area becomes infected, or if you suspect you are experiencing an allergic reaction to the stings.

If you are stung, these treatments can help alleviate the discomfort and prevent infection.

How can you protect your family and yourself from Red Imported Fire Ants?

- Reduce the risk of being stung when walking, gardening, or digging outdoors, by dressing properly:

- Wear gloves and closed-toe shoes with socks.

- Wear long pants and a long-sleeved shirt.

- Before you allow children to play outside, survey the area for ant mounds.

What should you do if you think you've found Red Imported Fire Ants?

- Do not disturb the suspected mound or nest.

- Hiring a licensed pest control operator is recommended because licensed professionals have access to the most effective management products and experience in controlling the pest.

- If you choose to perform your own pest management, there are pesticide products available at your local garden supply store. Products with the active ingredient *hydramethylnon*, *abamectrin*, *pyriproxyfen*, *spinosad*, *methoprene* and *indoxacarb* are available in retail locations. As with any pest control situation, *always follow the pesticide label's directions*.

How are Red Imported Fire Ant infestations treated?

Treatment experts use an environmentally friendly safe, two-step process to eradicate Red Imported Fire Ants.

- First, experts will spread bait around the mounds that consists of an Insect Growth Regulator (IGR) mixed with ground-up corn cobs coated with soybean oil. The ants will carry the bait back to their nests where the active ingredient will sterilize the queen and keep the immature insects from becoming adults.

- Next, they spread similar bait containing a slow-acting pesticide. Again, the ants will carry it back to their mounds, where the pesticide will gradually poison and eradicate the insects over several weeks.

Both the pesticide and the IGR are used in extremely small doses – less than one-tenth of an ounce per acre – and both quickly lose their potency when exposed to air or water. Thus, they pose almost no threat to animals or humans.



For further information check our website (<http://acwm.lacounty.gov>) or you can reach us by phone: 800-233-9279.



RED IMPORTED FIRE ANTS