



Effective Fire Ant Control for Range and Pasture Owners Pays Dividends

ANTIXX[®] FIRE ANT BAIT

Effective baiting for fire ant control requires proper timing and commitment to stay ahead of the ants.

Red imported fire ants have been a problem for southern U.S. landowners for decades. They attack people, pets and livestock, not to mention damaging equipment and electrical parts. The University of Tennessee Extension Service estimates approximately 367 million acres in the southeastern U.S., California, New Mexico and Puerto Rico are currently infected¹. Losses total in the billions of dollars.

As a landowner, it may not be cost-effective to treat an entire property, but this doesn't mean fire ants can't be managed in areas where they cause the most trouble. Experts suggest mapping out your property and identifying where the greatest need to treat fire ants are—then develop a plan for each location².

Areas where landowners might need to broadcast bait:

- Pasture and rangeland areas where livestock are born.
- Habitat for vulnerable wildlife populations in a hunting enterprise.
- Hay pastures where mounds can damage equipment.

In these scenarios, it's typically too costly to treat by individual mound, not to mention the likelihood of not finding all the mounds in the area. Currently, there is no feasible method to completely eradicate fire ants.



However, ongoing monitoring and repeated application of bait, at appropriate times, can keep populations at tolerable levels.

Of course, it's important to match the product used with each location treated. Some products can be used for lawns but not pastures. Others can be used around corrals or sheds but are not for use in crop areas. Always check labels and use the appropriate product for every location and scenario.

Products like Antixx® Fire Ant Bait, which have spinosad as the active ingredient, are labeled for broad usage in range and pasture, as well as lawns, gardens, parks, farmsteads, golf courses and playgrounds. Spinosad is naturally derived from soil bacterium so it's gentle on the environment but works quickly and effectively to start killing mounds, including the queen, within 24 hours.

When to treat

Fire ant bait is attractive and deadly to foraging red imported fire ants and is readily taken back into the nest as food for the colony. The active ingredient in the bait is distributed throughout the colony, killing the ants, including the queen. That means temperatures have to be warm enough (but not too warm) for ants to be foraging—typically between 70 degrees and 90 degrees Fahrenheit, according University of Tennessee Extension. Just because you see ants out doesn't mean they are foraging; they could just be trying to warm up. One trick is to set a potato chip out near a mound. If the ants are all over it within 30 minutes, they are foraging.

While fire ants prefer open, sunny areas, they don't like to forage in the middle of the day when

temperatures are very warm, so either early morning or late afternoon applications during the summer are more effective.

Don'ts

It is equally important to know when not to bait, including times when:

- It has just rained and the foliage is still wet or is expected to rain within 24 hours.
- Immediately before or after cutting hay, as mounds disturbances will decrease foraging and possibly cause a colony to move temporarily.

Methods of Broadcast Application

The Alabama Cooperative Extension has a helpful resource titled, "Managing Fire Ants with Baits." However, it is important to follow label directions on any product. They supersede what third-party materials recommend. Depending on how many acres need treated and how expensive labor is, landowners can choose from a handheld box spreader for smaller jobs or a herd seeder if treating more than 10 acres.

With the handheld box spreader, proper bait application relies on adjusting the gate (where the bait flows out) and the spinner speed so that just enough bait comes out enough bait to match label directions. If too much bait goes out, you're wasting product and money.

Herd seeders can be hooked up to ATVs, tractors or trucks and are specifically designed for fire ant bait applications. Depending on

where you live, you may be able to borrow a spreader from your local Extension service.

Use it or Lose it

Once opened, fire ant bait should be used as soon as possible. Ants will not be attracted to stale or rancid bait. Maintain the freshness and attractiveness of the bait by keeping the container tightly sealed and using the product within the season of purchase. If your bait is at all questionable, use the potato chip trick along with a little bit of bait. If the ants go after the chip but not your bait, then it's not fresh. If they don't go after either, they aren't foraging so it's not a good application time anyway. Also, when buying fire ant bait, consider it like groceries—don't leave it in a hot car too long or it will start to degrade.

Payoffs of managing fire ants correctly include:

- Fewer personnel stings
- Fewer animal stings
- More palatable grazing
- Effective forage use
- Lower risk of equipment damage

Combined, all of these work toward a better bottom line.

More information is available at www.neudorffpro.org/ant-baits.html.

1. *2020 Fire Ant Management in Pastures and Rangeland*, University of Tennessee Extension, <https://extension.tennessee.edu/publications/Documents/W648.pdf>
2. *Management of Imported Fire Ants in Cattle Production Systems*, Alabama Cooperative Extension, http://counties.agrilife.org/liberty/files/2015/11/fireantscattle_23.pdf
3. *Managing Fire Ants with Baits*, Alabama Cooperative Extension Service, <https://www.aces.edu/blog/topics/crop-production/managing-fire-ants-with-baits/>

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