



# ANTIXX<sup>®</sup>

## FIRE ANT BAIT

*Around homes, parks and playgrounds, fire ants pose a threat to people, their pets and the ability to simply enjoy the outdoors.*

The red imported fire ant is more than just a nuisance to people living in infested areas. They are aggressive and will attack helpless pets, children, the elderly and ground-nesting wildlife that can't get away from them. The stings are painful, leaving a small pustule (blister-like sore) behind that can cause secondary infections or scarring. While allergic reactions are rare, they do happen<sup>1</sup>.

While fire ants prefer open areas exposed to sun—like a soccer field or backyard—they've also been known to nest inside cars, walls of buildings and around electrical equipment like heat pumps and air conditioners<sup>2</sup>. Fortunately, research shows there are a few successful control strategies to minimize their destructive presence, though total eradication is not feasible<sup>2</sup>.

Timing is everything when it comes to managing fire ant populations. Janet Hurley is a Texas AgriLife Extension specialist whose expertise is in integrated pest management for schools. She says when treating fire ants, the key is to try and stay ahead of them with fire ant bait.

"We typically recommend a spring and a fall broadcast treatment," she explains. "But even if I was doing it in my flowerbed, I would want to do that after the soil temperature gets up to 60 to 70 degrees

## Tips for Managing Fire Ants in Residential Areas



*In Hawaii, a rainforest species called little fire ant nests on the ground, in leaf litter and on vegetation.*

*After foraging on vegetation, they will fall to the ground—often on people and pets.*

*An infested area will have millions of ants per acre, so staying on top of treatment is crucial.*

Fahrenheit. They've got to be foraging for the bait to work. When it's cool, you might see some fire ants come out, but they're just trying to warm up. When the soil starts to warm up, they start foraging and they don't stop until September or October, depending on where you are. If you're in a warm area like the Texas Rio Grande Valley where it hardly ever gets cold, they don't stop. Ever."

In between the seasonal broadcast treatments, you can control individual mounds with a fast-acting bait as needed. It's called the "Two-Step Program<sup>3</sup>."

"If you bait and you're really good about it, generally you can keep ahead of them," Hurley advises. "We recommend area-wide baiting. But you also have to understand it doesn't happen overnight. It typically takes a few days for the product to work and take out the mound."

While there are many fire ant control products to choose from, when dealing with sensitive residential areas, like homes or day care centers, exposure to toxic chemicals is always a concern. As far as active ingredients go, Hurley says products containing

spinosad are a good choice in these types of environments. Spinosad is a naturally occurring metabolite of soil-dwelling bacteria.

"I like it because of how it's manufactured," she explains. "Rather than being synthetic or man-made, it's processed in a way that mimics nature. Therefore, it's not harmful to nature."

Products like Antixx<sup>®</sup> Fire Ant Bait, which have spinosad as their active ingredient, are highly effective, killing the colony inside and out—including the queen. Dead ants appear within 24 to 36 hours and protection lasts up to two months.

According to research from the Virginia Cooperative Extension, other important considerations when treating individual mounds, include:

- The mound should not be disturbed prior to treatment, as that could cause the workers to move the queen or even the whole colony to a new location before they can come in contact with the bait.
- Be sure to read the label of your product because some granular or dust formulations may require the product to be applied around the mound instead of directly on it, which could anger the ants and cause them to move. Others require the product to be watered in.

### Bait broadcasting tips:

- If a large area needs to be treated using a broadcast method, follow label rates as excess bait can repel the fire ants.

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■ Alabama Cooperative Extension System research shows hand-held box spreaders are more effective at broadcasting fire ant bait than a fertilizer spreader, which may not let the bait flow as freely through the hopper<sup>4</sup>.

■ Broadcasting at the proper time will not only manage mature fire ant colonies, but also young colonies that haven't constructed a mound yet<sup>4</sup>. The idea is to treat before they spread out into additional colonies if possible.

Experts also point out adequately controlling fire ant populations requires repeated treatments and monitoring throughout the year. However, while you may need multiple rounds of treatment, it is best not to store fire ant bait for long periods of time. Bait has to be fresh for the ants to be attracted to it. If unsure, put a little bait and a potato chip out around a mound for about 30 minutes. 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.

For more information on how to control fire ants in residential or urban areas, visit [www.neudorffpro.org/ant-baits.html](http://www.neudorffpro.org/ant-baits.html).

1. *Managing Fire Ants in Urban Areas*, University of Florida-Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdf/files/LH/LH05900.pdf>
2. *Red Imported Fire Ant (RIFA)*, Virginia Cooperative Extension, <https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/444/444-284/444-284.html>
3. *Managing Fire Ants for Specific Sites*, Texas AgriLife Extension, <https://fireant.tamu.edu/manage/site/>
4. *Managing Fire Ants with Baits*, Alabama Cooperative Extension Service, <https://www.aces.edu/blog/topics/crop-production/managing-fire-ants-with-baits/>