Harold spreader. When broadcast, and spinosad (works in several weeks). They may need to be reapplied more often than slower acting and longer lasting products such as abamectin, methomyl, metophane, methoprene or pyriproxyfen, which work in 1 to 2 months when applied in spring and 6 months when applied in fall. Products that combine fast- and slow-acting ingredients, such as hydramethylnon plus methomyl (Extinquish® Plus, Amdro® Firestrike), may control ants better because they act quickly and last longer.

To broadcast bait products correctly, you will need a standard lawn spreader or a hand-held spreader. To cover larger areas, use a vehicle-mounted spreader such as the Herd® GT-77. Most baits are applied at very low rates such as 1 to 2 pounds of product per acre. Calculate the area to be treated and use the smallest spreader setting that allows bait to flow. Apply the bait in swaths, crisscrossing the treated areas if possible. See the application instructions on the label of the product you are using.

Long-residual Contact Insecticide Treatments
With this approach, a contact insecticide is applied to the lawn and landscape surface. This method is not as expensive as other control methods but it may be more effective in smaller areas because ants that move into treated areas will be eliminated as long as the chemical is active. Granular products are best applied with a push-type fertilizer spreader and must be watered in after treatment.

Granular fipronil products are slower acting but longer lasting; only one treatment is permitted per year. Faster-acting contact insecticides, such as the pyrethroids (list above), eliminate ants on the surface for months but may not eliminate colonies nesting deeper in the soil.

Individual Mound Treatments
Although treating ant mounds individually is more labor intensive and may use more insecticide than other methods, it is a suitable approach for small areas with few fire ant mounds (fewer than 20 per acre) or where you want to preserve native ants. Faster-acting bait products (hydramethylnon, indoxacarb, spinosad) can be used to treat individual ant mounds and are ideal for treating inaccessible colonies like those nesting under sidewalks, in plant beds and at the bases of tree trunks. Some mound treatment products are available as liquid drenches, injectable aerosols, dusts, or granules that are watered in to the mound. Ants are killed only if the insecticide contacts them, so proper application is essential. These treatments are most effective when ants are nesting close to the mound surface (as they do when the temperature is mild). Colonies should not be disturbed during treatment. If you use a watering can to apply insecticide, do not use the can later for other purposes.

Make a Management Plan
Chemical control lasts only as long as the effects of the insecticide used, or until the specified amount is applied. The agitators in some spreaders may cause bait to cake up so that it does not flow properly. Always read and follow the application instructions on the label of the product you are using.

Further Information
For more detailed information on fire ant identification, biology and management alternatives, contact your county Extension office or a professional pest control operator. Or, visit the following Web sites:
http://fireant.tamu.edu
http://www.fireants.org/fire+ants

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Identifying Fire Ants

If you have ant problems, first identify the species. There are hundreds of ant species in the southern United States, including some native fire ant species, and most of them escaped mound treatment can quickly form colonies that escaped mound treatment can quickly form colonies. For most homeowners, colonies that escaped mound treatment can quickly form colonies. For most homeowners, there may not be one “best” method for fire ant control, especially in large areas. Your objective should be to find the method or methods that are most cost-effective and environmentally sound. In areas where these ants do not present problems, doing nothing is certainly one option.

Control Products

Biological control: Government and university researchers have imported and tested natural enemies of fire ants, such as the parasitic phorid flies from South America. These natural enemies have been successful in areas where they have been released. However, the biological control agents available on the retail market, such as parasitic nematodes, do not sustain themselves or spread on their own once they are released.

Home remedies: Many home remedies have been devised to control fire ants. Drenching a mound with 2 to 10 gallons of boiling water eliminates ant colonies about 60 percent of the time, but it will also kill any plants the water contacts. This method is labor intensive and the hot water must be handled carefully. Some home remedies are considered beneficial insects. Collectively, these ants and their nests can do a lot of harm to your property.

Control Approaches

The Two-Step Method

Step 1. Broadcasting an insecticide bait once or twice a week, which reduces fire ant colonies by 80 to 90 percent.
Step 2. Treating nuisance mounds or colonies that move into the bait-treated areas. Step 2 may not be needed.

This is likely to be the most cost-effective and environmentally sound approach to treating medium-size to large landscape areas. Certified organic products can be used for broadcast bait and mound treatments. For livestock pastures, select products registered for use on such sites, such as Amdro Professional, Esteem, Extinguish®, or Extinguish Plus®.

The bait you apply determines how quickly ants will be controlled and how long the effect will last. Faster-acting bait products include indoxacarb (works in 3 to 5 days), hydramethylnon (works in 7 to 14 days for mound treatments and in 2 to 3 weeks for large areas), and fipronil. Some affect the digestive system (boric acid) or metabolism (hydramethylnon and Amdro®). Other bait ingredients interfere with reproduction or growth; these include fenoxycarb (Amdro®), methoprene (Extinguish®) and pyriproxyfen (Extinguish®). A relatively new type of bait combines two different active ingredients: hydramethylnon and methoprene (AMDRO FireStrike® or Extinguish Plus®). To be effective, baits must be fresh and applied when ants are actively foraging. To determine if the time is right for treatment, place a small amount of bait in the area to be treated and see if foraging ants remove it within an hour. Because ants collect bait and return it to the colony, very little insecticide is needed in this formulation. Baits are ruined by water, so do not water baits after application or apply them when rain is expected.

Imported fire ant queen, workers and eggs. Mounted spreader.

When the mound is disturbed, fire ants emerge quickly and begin biting and stinging. They will even run up vertical surfaces. Worker fire ants are dark reddish-brown with shiny black abdomens, and are about ¼ to about ¾ inch long.

Controlling Fire Ants

The current USDA quarantine for imported fire ants covers 320 million acres in all or parts of 14 U.S. states and territories (Alabama, Arkansas, California, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Puerto Rico). The quarantine means that shipments of hay, nursery stock, seed and other articles from quarantined counties must comply with state regulations. Mound treatments can’t be eliminated entirely because it’s not possible to treat all areas that are infested. Thus, the goal of current integrated pest management (IPM) programs is to suppress fire ants as much as possible with biological control methods and pesticides only where it is economically and environmentally justifiable to do so.

There may not be one “best” method for fire ant control, especially in large areas. Your objective should be to find the method or methods that are most cost-effective and environmentally sound. In areas where these ants do not present problems, doing nothing is certainly one option.

Organic products: A few treatments are certified organic. These include ingredients such as d-limonene, an extract from citrus fruit, or fipronil, a chemical complex produced by a soil microbe.

Insecticide formulations and modes of action: Products are formulated as dusts, granules, liquid drenches or sprays. They are applied either to individual ant mounds or across the surface of the ground (broadcast). The active ingredients vary in different ways.

Most active ingredients are contact insecticides that affect the nervous system of ants that come in contact with them. Contact insecticides include acephate (Orthene®), carbaryl (Sevin®), fipronil (Over ‘N Out® broadcast granules), pyrethrins, pyrethroids (bifenthrin, cyfluthrin, permethrin, deltamethrin, lambda-cyhalothrin, permethrin, esfenvalerate, tefluthrin or tralomethrin), and fipronil. These ingredients interfere with reproduction or growth; these include fenoxycarb (Amdro®), methoprene (Extinguish®) and fipronil. Some affect the digestive system (boric acid) or metabolism (hydramethylnon and Amdro®). Other bait ingredients interfere with reproduction or growth; these include fenoxycarb (Amdro®), methoprene (Extinguish®) and pyriproxyfen (Extinguish®). A relatively new type of bait combines two different active ingredients: hydramethylnon and methoprene (AMDRO FireStrike® or Extinguish Plus®). To be effective, baits must be fresh and applied when ants are actively foraging. To determine if the time is right for treatment, place a small amount of bait in the area to be treated and see if foraging ants remove it within an hour. Because ants collect bait and return it to the colony, very little insecticide is needed in this formulation. Baits are ruined by water, so do not water baits after application or apply them when rain is expected.

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