

Good news! With persistence, patience and the right plan, fire ants **can be controlled**. The Two-Step Method gives excellent control of red imported fire ants, especially in larger lawns and where applied to entire neighborhoods.

When applied properly this method poses little risk to people or pets. And the necessary ingredients can be found at most nursery supply or garden centers.

1 Let them eat bait!

The first step in the Two-Step Method is to broadcast one of the many excellent fire ant baits over your entire lawn. When collected by foraging ants, fire ant bait particles are carried to all colonies in the yard and shared with queens and other fire ants in their underground nests.

Baits consist of a food combined with a slow-acting insecticide. Baits make efficient use of very small amounts of pesticides because they are delivered into the colony by the ants themselves.

Baits **can** be applied directly to a fire ant mound, but they usually work best when scattered lightly over the entire yard or area to be treated. This controls visible as well as hidden fire ant nests.

Two types of spreaders can be used to broadcast baits. The type you use depends on the kind of bait chosen. Baits designed to be applied at rates of 1 to 1½ pounds per acre can be put out using a hand-held seed spreader. Set the spreader to the smallest setting. One pass over the area to be treated is generally sufficient, as the amounts to be applied are very low.

Some products are specially formulated to be put out at higher rates using a standard, push-type fertilizer spreader. Read the label for the product you choose to determine the best type of spreader to use.

Baits do not kill fire ants overnight, so be patient. Products containing indoxacarb, hydramethylnon and spinosad work the fastest. They will control fire ants within 2 to 4 weeks.

Baits that contain an insect growth regulator (such as fenoxycarb, pyriproxifen or methoprene) usually require 2 to 6 months for control, but they generally



Use a hand-held seed spreader to apply fire ant bait.

do not need to be reapplied more than once every 1 or 2 years if you treat more than 1 or 2 acres.

Apply baits at the right time. Baits work only when applied while the fire ants are actively searching for food. When applied during this time, the ants will take the baits to their underground nests within a few hours.

Getting the Most from Baits

- Use fresh baits, preferably from an unopened container. Once opened, baits should be used within a month or two. Unopened containers have about a 2-year shelf life.
- Test baits for freshness before using them. Sprinkle a small amount next to an active mound. If the bait is fresh, it will be picked up by fire ants within 30 minutes.
- Don't water the lawn after applying baits, and don't apply baits when rain is expected within 8 hours.
- Not sure if ants are actively foraging? Place a small amount of fresh bait, hot dog slice or potato chips next to a mound. If the ants begin removing the food within 1 hour, it's OK to begin the Two-Step.
- During hot weather, apply baits only in the evening. When daytime soil temperatures exceed 90 °F, any baits applied during the day quickly lose their effectiveness. During the summer, fire ants forage mostly at night to avoid the heat.

So when are ants actively searching for food? Fire ants forage when soil surface temperatures are between 70 and 90 °F. For most of Texas, the best time to bait is between May and September. In the winter, when soil temperatures are cooler, fire ants may build mounds but they forage little.

2 Treat problem mounds

The second step is to directly treat any ant colony that needs immediate control. Applying an insecticide or other treatment directly to a fire ant mound is the fastest way to get rid of most fire ant colonies.

Because broadcast bait treatments provide slower control of most of the fire ants in your yard, limit Step 2 treatments to mounds located next to the house foundation, in high-traffic areas or in other sensitive spots where you want fast control.

Treating individual mounds takes more time than does broadcasting baits; however it may be all you need if your yard has only a few mounds. Step 2 treatment options include:

- **Granular products**, which contain an insecticide that releases into the soil when water is applied. Sprinkle the recommended amount of insecticide on top and around the mound. Most products should then be watered into the mound with at least 1 to 2 gallons of water. A sprinkling can is best for gently washing chemicals into the nest without washing the granules off the mound. Do not use a hose for this purpose.



Most granular (non-bait) products contain an insecticide that releases into the soil when drenched with water.

- **Liquid concentrates**, which are mixed with water and applied to a mound. As with granules, always use 1 to 2 gallons of water per mound to get enough solution deep into the nest where the queen lives.
- **Insecticide dusts**, which are designed to be sprinkled lightly over the entire mound. Avoid disturbing the mound during the application, as this can disturb and disperse the ants. It's best to keep children and pets away from treated mounds until the dust is gone.



Dry dusts are convenient and easy to apply.

- **Baits**, which can be used as direct-mound treatments, although they are generally slow to work. When applying directly to a mound, use one of the fast-acting baits. This type of treatment is especially good for colonies next to sidewalks or curbs, where the nests often extend under the concrete.
- **Naturally derived insecticides**, which are available in a number of different formulations and using different natural ingredients. As with other treatments, be sure to apply enough water when using liquids or granules.
- **Shoveling**, which can be used to move fire ants from gardens, compost piles or other sensitive sites. Wear rubber gloves and liberally dust the gloves, shovel and bucket with talcum powder to keep the ants from scattering and to reduce the risk of stings. Once captured, the colonies can be dispatched by carefully dousing them with soapy water. Do not attempt this method if you are allergic to fire ant stings.