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## Time to Treat for Fire Ants

Red imported fire ants, *Solenopsis invicta* Buren, are an invasive species that has infested over 300 million acres in the southern United States. On average, Americans spend over \$6 billion a year on medical bills, repairing damage to electrical wiring and purchasing insecticides for treatment of fire ants. For these reasons, the use of chemicals is needed to manage their populations, in order to allow the native ant species back into the landscape.

Fire ant baits, drenches, dusts and contact insecticides may be applied to control fire ants. It is advised to treat the individual fire ant mounds directly if less than 5 mounds are found within a 1/4 acre or less than 20 mounds within 1 acre, since this is not considered an infestation. However, if more than 5 mounds are present within a 1/4 acre or 20 mounds within an acre, then a fire ant bait or contact insecticide should be broadcasted over the entire infested area. Fire ant baits are made up of defatted corn grit covered with insecticide and soybean oil. The delivery process of baits into the colony is so effective, that the amount of insecticide applied within an area is significantly reduced. Before broadcasting the fire ant bait, foraging activity should be assessed, by placing a potato chip or hot dog next to the mound. If fire ants find the chip or hot dog within twenty minutes, then it is a suitable time to broadcast the bait. Fire ants will typically actively forage when the soil surface temperature is between 70 and 90° F, which is between May and September. Fire ant baits should never be watered into the soil and they should not be applied if they smell rancid. On the other hand, contact insecticides can also be broadcasted over the entire infested area and need to be watered into the soil. Control using contact insecticides generally lasts for 6 to 12 months, depending on the active ingredient within the insecticide.

Both fire ant baits and contact insecticides can be broadcasted using a hand-held spreader for small areas or a Herd Seeder can be mounted onto a truck or ATV for larger areas.

For more information, please visit the fire ant webpage at <http://fireant.tamu.edu>.



Photo of fire ant workers and fire ant mound. Photos by Bart Drees, Professor and Extension Entomologist, Texas A&M University.

## **Be on the Lookout for May Beetles**

As the weather warms, we will begin to see the adult May beetles (*Phyllophaga* spp.) flying under lights at night. These adults feed on leaves of several trees including oaks and pecans and can cause complete defoliation of the tree if large numbers of adults appear. Most healthy trees recover quickly from complete defoliation, but stressed trees can be damaged by these attacks.

The female May beetle will deposit eggs into the turf and the eggs will hatch into “c-shaped” grub worms that are creamy white in color with brown heads. The grubs feed on dead organic matter and roots of plants. Since the grubs feed on roots, they can injure roots of grasses and other plants. This causes infested turf to brown and it can be easily removed in large clumps.

### **Some Control Options:**

Irrigating the soil with  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  inches of water prior to treatment can improve the effectiveness, since the grubs will move closer to the soil surface. Parasitic nematodes in the genera *Steinernema* and *Heterorhabditis* have been shown to be effective. Insecticides containing imidacloprid, halofenozide, and clothianidin are some active ingredients that are effective at killing the smaller stages of grub worms and ideally should be applied 6 weeks after adults emerge. Lambda-cyhalothrin and trichlorfon are some examples of active ingredients more effective at killing the larger grub worm stages.



Picture of grub worms and damage on a golf course. Photo by Texas A&M University.

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