

# Black imported fire ant

## *Solenopsis richteri*

### What is it?

Fire ants are several species of ants in the genus *Solenopsis*. They are, however, only a minority in the genus, which includes over 200 species of *Solenopsis* worldwide.

Fire ants are a 'super pest'- aggressive, highly-adaptive and well-equipped for survival.

The black imported fire ant (*Solenopsis richteri*), or simply BIFA, was long thought to either be a subspecies or colour variation of *Solenopsis invicta* (red imported fire ant; RIFA), but is now recognized as its own species with a demonstratively different range and living habits. BIFA seem to be more tolerant of cold and a less dominant species than RIFA.

### Where are they from?

Black Imported Fire Ants are a native of South America. The range of these ants in South America extends from northern Argentina throughout Uruguay and into southern Brazil. The species was accidentally introduced into the south-eastern United States around 1918.

### Where will I find it?

Black Imported Fire Ants prefers open area grasslands, particularly pastures and lawns. The pampas of Argentina was its original preferred habitat. Young BIFA colonies prefer moister areas in which to build their mounds, whereas more mature colonies tend to emigrate to drier soil as they grow larger.

### What does it look like?

Characteristics common to all fire ants include a two-segmented waist, an absence of spines on the back of the ant (specifically, the propodeum), and a long hair (or seta) in the middle of the clypeus (just above the jaws). Workers have ten-segmented antennae, the last two segments of which form a distinct club. A characteristic seen only among the two species of imported fire ant is the median tooth centred along the front edge of the clypeus, which is flanked by two lateral teeth.



Black Imported Fire Ant workers showing the characteristic yellow spot on its gaster (MS) (photo by Blake Layton)

The final distinctions used to identify Black Imported Fire Ant are its black or dark brown coloration from which its name derives and a characteristic yellow spot on its gaster.

Ants have different castes so there are different types of ant morphologies for one species. There are major workers, minor workers, alate males (winged) and the queen ants.

### What do I look for?

The Black Imported Fire Ant, like other fire ants, is well known for aggressiveness and mound- building behaviours. Black Imported Fire Ants are highly territorial and respond to any threat to the mound with overwhelming force. Swarms of ants pour forth to defend their home, and the painfulness of their sting is second only to the sheer number of stings delivered by the attacking ants. All stings of imported fire ants will produce a sterile pustule that is helpful in distinguishing them from the bite of other insects.

### What can I do?

If you suspect that you have found ants that are exotic contact Biosecurity SA or the Exotic Plant Hotline.

