

RED IMPORTED FIRE ANT (RIFA)

Solenopsis invicta



Red imported fire ant (left) and nest (right).

Source: Queensland Government Department of Agriculture and Fisheries

The first detection in Australia of red imported fire ant occurred in Brisbane in 2001 and continues to be the target of a national cost-shared eradication program.

These ants, which are native to South America, are particularly aggressive and will repeatedly sting anything that appears a threat.

The impact of fire ants

Fire ants will affect everyone. They have the potential to limit Australia's outdoor lifestyle, devastate our environment and reduce production of some agricultural industries.

Fire ants will also impact on land and business values and threaten our orchards, crops and pastures.

They may even jeopardise our 'naturally', clean and green export image.

If fire ants bite children and pets they cause serious distress.

Fire ants can:

- inflict a painful, burning sting
- damage equipment and infrastructure
- reduce property values
- invade backyards, parks and recreational areas
- damage native flora and fauna
- injure animals and damage crops.

Identification

The red imported fire ant is very similar to several local ant species.

They are:

- small, 2-6mm long
- reddish-brown with a dark brown rear segment
- very aggressive
- agitated when disturbed

Red imported fire ant nests vary in shapes and sizes depending on age and soil type.

They are:

- usually closed (i.e.: no central opening)
- a dome shaped mound
- up to 45 cm high.

Spread:

Fire ants spread naturally through mating flights and budding. A mated female (queen) can fly up to 2km, while a newly mated queen finds a suitable nesting site, sheds her wings and starts a new colony.

Humans can spread fire ants via:

- shipments of infested nursery stock, soil or other fire ant carriers
- materials and containers stored in fire ant biosecurity zones
- machinery that has been used to move soil.

The movement into South Australia of any host material including containerised plants, potting media, soil, organic mulch, turf, hay, straw, agriculture machinery or used containers is prohibited from Queensland unless certified.

Reporting detections

RIFA represents a serious threat to our health, environment and economy. Members of the community and industry play an important role by reporting suspected detections. Early reporting is a vital part of preventing RIFA from establishing and spreading. RIFA is a notifiable pest in South Australian, which means there is a legal obligation to report suspected detections. This obligation applies to everyone, including individuals and organisations.

Anyone who suspects that they have seen RIFA or any other type of exotic invasive ants should report sightings to the Exotic Plant Pest Hotline on 1800 084 881.



Disclaimer: The material in this publication was prepared from the most up-to-date information available at the time of publication. It is intended as a guide only and the publisher accepts no responsibility

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