



# Fire Ant Control Methods Around Pets

*Nathan Riggs, Extension Agent - Integrated Pest Management (Fire Ant Project)  
Texas Agricultural Extension Service, San Antonio, TX*

The red imported fire ant can be a serious health problem for backyard pets. Fire ants can sting and, occasionally, kill small animals. According to a recent survey completed by veterinarians, small animals and pets are treated more frequently than any other type of animal for fire ant related health injuries.

Fire ants are commonly attracted to pet food. They can blanket a food bowl, making it impossible for pets to eat. When disturbed, mounds produce thousands of stinging fire ants, creating a potentially dangerous situation for pets while playing, running or digging near an ant mound.

Very young animals, caged animals, or those that are old and have difficulty moving, are most likely to be stung. Animals with open sores, “hot spots,” irritated skin, bandaged wounds, or limited mobility from other health problems are more vulnerable and attractive to fire ants. Such animals are also more likely to suffer severe reactions because of their weakened state.

Fire ants most readily sting body parts with little or no hair, such as the muzzle, eyes, ears, and the tender skin of the abdomen. If your pet is attacked, remove it as quickly as you can from the source of the fire ants. Then remove any fire ants that are still on your pet. Do not attempt to spray the fire ants off with a water hose, since ants will hang on with their jaws and sting repeatedly. Depending on the severity of the attack, treatment by a veterinarian may be necessary.

## Control

Currently several conventional and “organic” treatments exist that can be used to control fire ants. Be sure to remove your pet from the area when applying any type of product. The Two-Step Method can effectively control fire ants in heavily infested areas. This approach begins by broadcasting a fire ant bait (such as Amdro®, Award®, Ascend®, Distance®, Extinguish™, or Eliminator® fire ant baits) over the entire yard. Troublesome mounds near pets or other high-traffic areas are then treated individually with an approved dust, liquid or granular insecticide plus water. Individual mound treatments provide quick control of the worst mounds, while the bait treatments provide slower, more complete control of fire ant activity over the whole area. **When applying fire ant control products to areas where pets live, read and follow label instructions for safety and best results.**

Several “organic” methods of controlling fire ants also can be safe to use around your pets. For

recently produced mounds, pouring 2 to 3 gallons of very hot or boiling water over the mound will provide 50% to 60% control. Insecticide products containing pyrethrins (or a combination pyrethrin plus diatomaceous earth or silica dioxide), rotenone, pine oil, or d-limonene, can also provide adequate control of individual fire ant mounds.

When applied properly, broadcast-applied bait products are unlikely to harm pets. This is due to the relative low toxicity of the insecticides used, the small percentage of active ingredient used in baits, and low application rates. When applied at the recommended rate (usually 1 to 1 ½ pounds per acre), baits should be thoroughly scattered so they are barely visible on the ground, and essentially unavailable to contact pets. If the fire ants are active, baits will be rapidly picked up by worker ants and removed to underground nests, away from people, birds, and pets.

Despite their relatively low toxicity, caution should always be exercised when applying baits to pet territories. Remove pets during application and take care to sweep up any small piles of spilled bait product. When ingested in large enough quantities, some baits can be toxic to pets so store them properly in a manner to make them inaccessible to pets. Do not leave visible piles of bait on top of fire ant mounds, as this may tempt some pets to feed on the product.

Dust, granular and liquid insecticides should be thoroughly watered into the mound and allowed to dry before allowing pets nearby. The use of baits as a mound treatment, or use of granular products without watering-in, may pose a hazard in backyards with pets, as pesticides may remain on the surface in high concentrations where pets can easily contact them.

---

For more information regarding fire ant management, see Extension publications [B-6043](#), *Managing Red Imported Fire Ants in Urban Areas*; [B-6076](#), *Managing Red Imported Fire Ants in Agriculture*; [B-6099](#), *Broadcast Baits for Fire Ant Control*; or [L-5070](#) *The Texas Two-Step Method Do-It-Yourself Fire Ant Control for Homes and Neighborhoods*. Also visit our web site at <http://fireant.tamu.edu>.

---

*The information given herein is for educational purposes only. Reference to commercial products or trade names is made with the understanding that no discrimination is intended and no endorsement by Texas Cooperative Extension or the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station is implied.*

*Educational programs conducted by Texas Cooperative Extension serve people of all ages regardless of socioeconomic level, race, color, sex, religion, disability or national origin.*