

# Managing Fire Ants in Vegetable Gardens

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The red imported fire ant, *Solenopsis invicta* Buren (Hymenoptera: Formicidae), can be a serious problem for anyone planting and caring for a garden in infested parts of Texas and the South. Fire ants are attracted to the abundant moisture, rich organic soil, and the wide variety of foods available to them in gardens.

Fire ants are social insects. Their colonies are usually found outdoors, although some have been found in homes and in other structures. Outdoors, their mounds can be up to 18 inches tall and several feet in diameter. Each colony may contain one or more queen ants and more than 200,000 worker ants. Each queen ant lays as many as 800 eggs per day.

Worker ants forage for food and love to eat greasy or oily materials (see [Fire Ant Biology](#)). In gardens, this includes oil-containing seeds, seed pods, and insects (pests and beneficial insects).

### Options for Controlling Fire Ants In Vegetable Gardens

| Type/Active Ingredient            | Trade Names  | Comments   |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|
| <b>Bait products<sup>1</sup>:</b> |  |  |
| hydramethylnon                    | Amdro Fire Ant Bait/Amdro Fire Strike/Amdro Yard Treatment         | Not approved for use in vegetable gardens, but can be applied around and outside the borders of the garden so the worker ants inside and outside of the garden can gather the bait and take it back to their colonies. |
| abamectin                         | Clinch/Ascend/Varsity Award II, Enforcer Fire Ant Bait             |  |
| fenoxycarb                        | Award  |  |
| pyriproxyfen                      | Distance/Esteem  |  |
| s-methoprene + hydromethlynon     | Extinguish Plus/Amdro Fire Strike Fire Ant Bait for Yard Treatment |  |
| indoxacarb                        | Spectracide Fire Ant Killer Plus Preventer Bait Once & Done        |  |
| metaflumazone                     | Siesta   |  |
| s-methoprene                      | Extinguish Professional Fire Ant Bait                              | Approved for cropland (including vegetable gardens). Requires 6 to 8 weeks for effects to begin.   |
| pyriproxifen                      | Esteem Ant Bait  |  |
| spinosad                          | FertiLome Come and Get It  | Approved for vegetable gardens.<br><sup>*</sup> OMRI certified, approved for organic vegetable gardens.  |



| <b>“Organic” methods<sup>2</sup>:</b>        |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| pyrethrins + diatomaceous earth              | Organic Solutions Multipurpose Fire Ant Killer/Diatect Results Fire Ant Killer                             | Effective mound drench at 4 tablespoons per gallon of water. Provides quick kill with short-term residues.  |
| diatomaceous earth (DE)                      | N/A  | Horticultural-type DE applied to mounds as a dust or water suspension may move ant colonies, but probably not eliminate them.   |
| D-limonene                                   | Orange Avenger*  | *OMRI certified (see <a href="http://www.omri.org/manufacturers/94301/orange-avenger-llc">http://www.omri.org/manufacturers/94301/orange-avenger-llc</a> , approved for organic vegetable gardens.  |
| spinosad                                     | Greenlight Lawn and Garden Spray/Fertilome products, Monterey Garden Insect Spray, several Bonide products | Approved for vegetable gardens.   |
| <b>Pyrethoid insecticides:</b><br>bifenthrin | Ortho Bug B Gone Max/Ortho Max Lawn and Garden Insect Killer for Lawns/Over N Out/Bayer Lawn and Garden    | Some of these products are approved against soil insects in the garden, including fire ants, and may suppress foraging by ants. Other products can be used only in the lawn or on label-listed vegetables. Check the label for approved uses. |
| β-cyfluthrin                                 |  |   |
| <b>Carbamate insecticide:</b><br>carbaryl    | Sevin, various products  | Read product label to determine if the product is approved for fire ants in the vegetable garden. Formulated as liquids, dusts, or granules.  |
| <b>Organophosphates:</b><br>acephate         | Various, EX: Ortho Orthene Fire Ant Killer/Surrender Fire Ant Killer                                       | Formulated as liquids, dusts, or granules. Read the label carefully to determine if the product is labeled for application in a vegetable garden. If not, they can be applied directly to mounds outside the garden.                          |
| <b>Non-Chemical Methods<sup>3</sup>:</b>     |  |   |
| Very-hot-to-boiling water                    | N/A  | 1 to 2 gallons of very hot to boiling water will kill <i>fresh</i> fire ant colonies in mounds 60 percent of the time. Be careful not to cook the plants.   |

<sup>1</sup>See *Broadcast Baits for Fire Ant Control*

<sup>2</sup>See *Natural, Organic, and Alternative Methods for Imported Fire Ant Management*

<sup>3</sup>See *Are there any home remedies that will kill fire ants?*

They have been reported to feed on okra pods and tunnel into potato tubers, particularly during periods of dry weather (see [What do fire ants eat?](#)). The following chart outlines options and strategies available to combat fire ants in vegetable gardens.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## REFERENCES

### *Fire Ant Biology*

[www.extension.org/pages/60963/fire-ant-biology](http://www.extension.org/pages/60963/fire-ant-biology)

### *What do fire ants eat?*

[www.extension.org/pages/60922/what-do-fire-ants-eat](http://www.extension.org/pages/60922/what-do-fire-ants-eat)

### *Broadcast Baits for Fire Ant Control*

[www.agrilifebookstore.org/product-p/e-628.htm](http://www.agrilifebookstore.org/product-p/e-628.htm)

### *Natural, Organic, and Alternative Methods for Imported Fire Ant Management*

[u.tamu.edu/ento-009](http://u.tamu.edu/ento-009)

*Are there any home remedies that will kill fire ants?*

[www.extension.org/pages/34814/are-there-any-home-remedies-that-will-kill-fire-ants](http://www.extension.org/pages/34814/are-there-any-home-remedies-that-will-kill-fire-ants)

*Managing Red Imported Fire Ants in Urban Areas*

[www.extension.org/pages/11004/managing-imported-fire-ants-in-urban-areas-printable-version](http://www.extension.org/pages/11004/managing-imported-fire-ants-in-urban-areas-printable-version)

*Fire Ant Control: The Two-Step Method and Other Approaches*

[www.agrilifebookstore.org/product-p/ento-034.htm](http://www.agrilifebookstore.org/product-p/ento-034.htm)

**For more information regarding fire ant management, see Extension publications *Managing Red Imported Fire Ants in Urban Areas*, *Broadcast Baits for Fire Ant Control*, or *Fire Ant Control: The Two-Step Method and Other Approaches* posted on <http://AgriLifeBookstore.org>.**

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