

Vector Spotlight

Red Imported Fire Ants (RIFA)



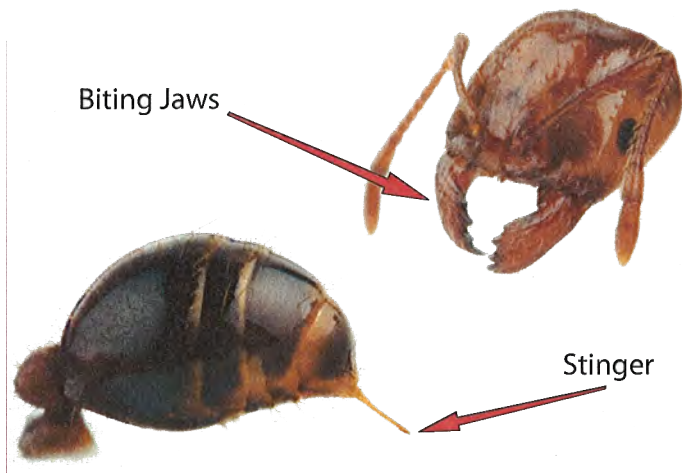
General Information

Red imported fire ants (RIFA) are very aggressive and invasive ants. The insects are called “imported” because they are not native to this county. It is believed that they came to the U.S. from South America aboard cargo ships that docked in Mobile, Alabama in the 1930’s. RIFA vigorously defend their nests, attack in large numbers and sting repeatedly. They can attack agricultural workers, compete with beneficial insects and devour important crops.

Health Risks

RIFA stings are fatal to a small percentage of the population who are allergic to the venom. For people who aren’t allergic, RIFA stings form pusules and itching for up to two weeks. Ants are attracted to pet food and can sting hungry pets when disturbed. These attacks are serious since the muzzles are usually attacked first. This can create swelling, which can obstruct breathing. Toll on wildlife is also considerable.

What Makes them Dangerous?



Where You Find Them

In Southern California, RIFA colonies rarely build large mound typical of RIFA in other parts of the country. Almost all of the mounds in our area are found in irrigated area. Look for a patch of fine granular soil where it doesn’t belong -- like in the middle of the lawn. It is possible that if a colony has settled into an irrigated planter or other landscaped area, a mound will develop. Another common location is adjacent to a hardscape feature like a large rock or concrete walkway. These large, dense objects are attractive to RIFA because they store heat during the day and release it during the night. The consistent temperature allows the colony to reproduce and to gather food 24 hours a day.



I Found a Mound! What do I do?

Regular methods of removing an ant colony will not work with RIFA colonies. DO NOT stomp on the mound, pour household chemicals into the ground and flood their mound. There is always a risk of RIFA relocating closer to your home! Contact your local pest control or vector control district to receive instructions on how best to handle a RIFA colony on your property.

Greater Los Angeles County Vector Control District

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