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To: Rains County Leader

From: Stephen Gowin  
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Re: News Article

Red imported fire ants love wet, rainy, cool days like the ones that ushered in spring. That's why so many of their mounds have been popping up all over Rains County. But, help is only two steps away.

When the ground temperature stays above 65 degrees for several days, fire ants begin to build up mounds, produce young and forage for food. That is one of the best times to manage populations.

The best way to control the red imported fire ants is the "Texas Two-Step" Method, which now incorporates organic products into the overall management plan. This plan follows an IPM approach that involves minimal risk to people, pets and the overall environment.

The first step is to let the fire ants eat bait. Apply a broadcast bait, which is a product containing a food source and an insecticide. The bait should be broadcast over the entire yard in the spring and fall. The bait is carried by the worker ants to the rest of the colony, where it becomes a shared food source. This product kills the whole fire ant colony, which prevents new mounds from forming and treats unseen mounds. To work correctly, baits must be applied at the right time and used with patience. Baits are only effective when the fire ants are searching for food.

Fire ants will forage when the soil surface temperature is between 70 and 90 degrees, which is usually between May and September. To see if fire ants are actively foraging, place a small amount of bait or food, such as a hot dog or potato chips by the mound. If the ants begin removing the food within 30 minutes, it is a good time to treat. Use only fresh bait, preferably from an unopened container. Once opened, baits should be used quickly. Apply baits when no rain is expected for at least 8 hours, as this reduces the risk of it being washed away.

In the summer, apply baits in the evening. During the cool of evening, ants will quickly discover

and carry off baits. If applied during the day, in extreme heat, baits quickly lose their effectiveness. Also, ants do not forage during the day.

The second step is to treat the individual mounds. The mound treatment is the fastest way to get rid of the fire ant mounds. However, step two should be limited to those mounds found around the foundation and in high traffic areas.

With dust products, no water is needed and they act fast. However, they leave a surface residue. Liquid drenches generally eliminate mounds within a few hours and leave little surface residue after application. Granular products are relatively fast acting and usually require putting granules on and around the mound and then sprinkling 1 to 2 gallons of water on without disturbing the mound. Closely follow directions on the label.

If you prefer not to apply pesticides yourselves, or want to ensure that treatments are applied uniformly and on time, consider a professional pest control company.

For more information, visit the fire ant website at <http://fireant.tamu.edu> or come by the Rains County Extension Office located at 410 Tawakoni Drive in Emory.