



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 attempting to plant and care for a garden in infested parts of Texas and the South. They are attracted to the abundant moisture found in gardens, the rich organic soil, and the wide variety of foods available to them. 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. In gardens, this includes oil-containing seeds, seed pods, and insects (pests and beneficial insects). They have been reported to feed on okra pods and tunnel into ripe tomatoes, particularly during periods of dry weather. The following chart outlines options and strategies available to combat fire ants in vegetable gardens.

Options For Controlling Fire Ants In Vegetable Gardens

Type/Active Ingredient	Trade Names	Comments
Bait products (B-6043, B-6099): hydramethylnon, abamectin, fenoxycarb, pyriproxyfen s-methoprene	Amdro®/Combat®; Ascend®/Varsity®; Logic®/Award ®; Distance®/Spectracide® fire ant bait products Extinguish™	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. Approved for cropland (including vegetable gardens). Requires 6-8 weeks for effects to begin.
“Organic” methods (FAPFS012): pyrethrins + diatomaceous earth diatomaceous earth (DE)	Organic Solutions™ Multipurpose Fire Ant Killer N/A	Effective mound drench at 4 tablespoons per gallon of water. Provides quick kill with short-term residues. Horticultural-type DE applied to mounds as a dust or water suspension may move ant colonies, but probably not eliminate them.
Pyrethroid insecticides: esfenvalerate cyfluthrin	Ortho® Bug B Gone Bayer® Advanced Garden products	Some of these products are approved against soil insects, including fire ants, in the garden and may suppress foraging by ants. <u>CHECK LABEL FOR APPROVED USES!</u> Same as for esfenvalerate.
Carbamate insecticide: carbaryl	Many different products containing Sevin® or carbaryl	<u>READ PRODUCT LABEL</u> to determine if product is approved for fire ants in the vegetable garden.
Non-Chemical Methods: very hot to boiling water	N/A	1-2 gallons of very hot to boiling water will kill <u>FRESH</u> fire ant mounds 60% of time. Be careful not to cook plants!

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>.

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