



# RED IMPORTED FIRE ANT

Originally from South America, the Red Imported Fire Ant (*Soenopsis invicta*) was accidentally introduced through the port of Mobile, Alabama prior to the 1940s, probably in soil used as ballast in cargo ships. Since then, it has infested fourteen US states as well as Puerto Rico. Red imported fire ants are not typically found in Delaware, though many interceptions have occurred over the past ten years due to the interstate-movement of nursery stock from infested areas in the Southern U.S.

Worker ants range from 1/8" to 1/4" long, their color is a dark reddish-brown, and is similar in appearance to many common native ants. The most striking feature of this ant is its stinger. Workers protecting their nest or food sources can repeatedly sting an attacker, with symptoms of the sting including burning, itching, small raised pustules at the site of the sting, anaphylactic shock, and occasionally death. An estimated 14 million people are stung by fire ants each year. Agriculture damage perpetrated by red imported fire ants include feeding on the buds, fruits, and germinating seeds of numerous crops such as corn, soybeans, okra, and citrus, leading to yield losses, as well as attacking livestock and other domestic and wildlife, which could cause low weight-gain, deformity, and death in young and newborn animals.

Fire ants will build their nests preferably in open, sunny areas like parks, lawns, meadows, pastures, and cultivated fields. Excavated soil from their nest is brought to the surface, which forms a mound up to 12" high and across. The sheer size of some nests in agriculture fields may interfere with combines and other machinery.

There are many commercially available ant-control products for homeowner use that are effective in treating fire ants. If fire ants are suspected to be found in Delaware, please contact the Delaware Department of Agriculture.



## QUICK FACTS

- Native to South America
- Introduced to the United States in the 1930s
- 1/8 – 1/4 inches long
- Ant mounds can be 12 inches high
- Sting can cause allergic reactions in humans

