

Applying Fire Ant Bait In The Fall

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With the dry conditions in some regions of the state, fire ant presence has been less noticeable until recently. However, imported fire ants are still around and even though their colonies may be less visible, the workers are still actively foraging. Now that parts of Arkansas have received rainfall, fire ant questions are on the rise. One question that frequently accompanies a fall fire ant call is: Can I apply fire ant baits this time of year? With a few precautions, the answer is YES. As long as temperatures do not get too cool, baiting fire ants in the fall is very effective. A good rule of thumb would be to apply fire ant baits prior to October 15. However during some milder falls, bait applications can be effective well after October 15. Fire ant baits should be applied when soil temperatures are 60°F or above. When in doubt, determine if fire ants are actively foraging. Foraging activity is easily evaluated by placing small pieces of hot dogs or greasy potato or corn chips in the area you plan on treating. Leave this attractive material out for thirty minutes and then check. If this food is covered in fire ants you know that they are actively foraging and application of a fire ant bait should be effective.



Active red imported fire ant colonies following a fall rain.



Fire ant colony on the University of Arkansas Fayetteville campus. Photo by Haylee Campbell.



Fire ants foraging on a “hot dog” bait.

Fall is an excellent time to control imported fire ants in your home garden especially if you plan on using the insect growth regulators (IGR) methoprene (Extinguish) or pyriproxyfen (Esteem). Baits containing an IGR generally take longer to achieve the desired results, however if any of these baits are applied now, control will occur prior to gardening next spring. For gardeners desiring an organic approach, products containing spinosad (Fertilome Come and Get It, Sunday Fire Ant Fighter, Firefighter Fire Ant Bait or Antixx Fire Ant Bait) is available. Remember that spinosad fire ant bait is applied at a higher rate (2.5 – 5.0 pounds per acre) than the other baits (1.0 – 1.5 pounds per acre). Note: Spinosad as an active ingredient is considered organic and derived from products obtained by fermentation of *Saccharopolyspora spinosa*, a soil dwelling bacterium. Not all products (including fire ant baits) containing spinosad are certified for

organic production (OMRI (Organic Materials Review Institute) certified). Non-certified spinosad products lack certification because they 1) contain a carrier that is not organic or 2) the manufacturer opted out of having their product certified by OMRI.

A wider variety of baits are labeled for use around the home or other non-agriculture sites. The products mentioned above are approved for use in residential and recreational turf as well as baits containing hydramethylnon, metaflumizone and indoxacarb. Baits containing indoxacarb (Advion) or metaflumizone (Siesta) are generally quicker in achieving desirable control. With indoxacarb bait applications, foraging activity is significantly reduced two days post-application and colonies controlled from two to seven days post-application. Older bait formulations such as Amdro (hydramethylnon) and Extinguish Plus (hydramethylnon and methoprene) are very effective and easy to find but may require two to three weeks to achieve control.

Livestock producers have four fire ant bait products from which to choose. Extinguish (methoprene), Amdro Pro (hydramethylnon), Extinguish Plus (methoprene and hydramethylnon) and Esteem (pyriproxyfen) are all labeled for use in pastures grazed by livestock intended for meat and milk production as well as companion animals. Advion fire ant bait is now labeled for use in fenced pastures but only if grazed by companion animals (i.e., animals not raised for production of meat or milk). Advion fire ant bait is a fast acting toxin and provides control within a few days after application. Extinguish and Esteem are IGRs; Amdro Pro is a slow acting toxin; and Extinguish Plus is a combination of a slow acting toxin and an IGR. Products such as Amdro Pro and Extinguish Plus provide control within about 3 weeks. The IGRs, Esteem and Extinguish, will usually provide control within one to two months.

Should you treat individual mounds or broadcast bait over the entire area? The best answer is to broadcast if colony density is twenty or more per acre. If less than twenty colonies per acre are present, then treating individual colonies could be considered. When baiting individual colonies remember do not apply directly to the mound, instead apply uniformly from one to three feet around the base of the mound. Also, never disturb the mound prior to treatment.

Occasionally fire ants will forage indoors especially during dry conditions; so can we apply fire ant baits indoors? Yes, but in a very specific manner. Usually a good bait application outside and particularly around the structure's perimeter will provide the control necessary to prevent fire ants from foraging indoors. However, Amdro Pro, Extinguish and Extinguish Plus can be used inside structures but only under very specific circumstances. These three products are labeled for use inside structures but ONLY in inaccessible areas such as cracks, crevices, wall voids, unfinished attics and crawlspaces of structures such as homes, commercial residences, commercial buildings and warehouses. Please consult the label for more detailed information on indoor use.