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the imported fire ant



UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE

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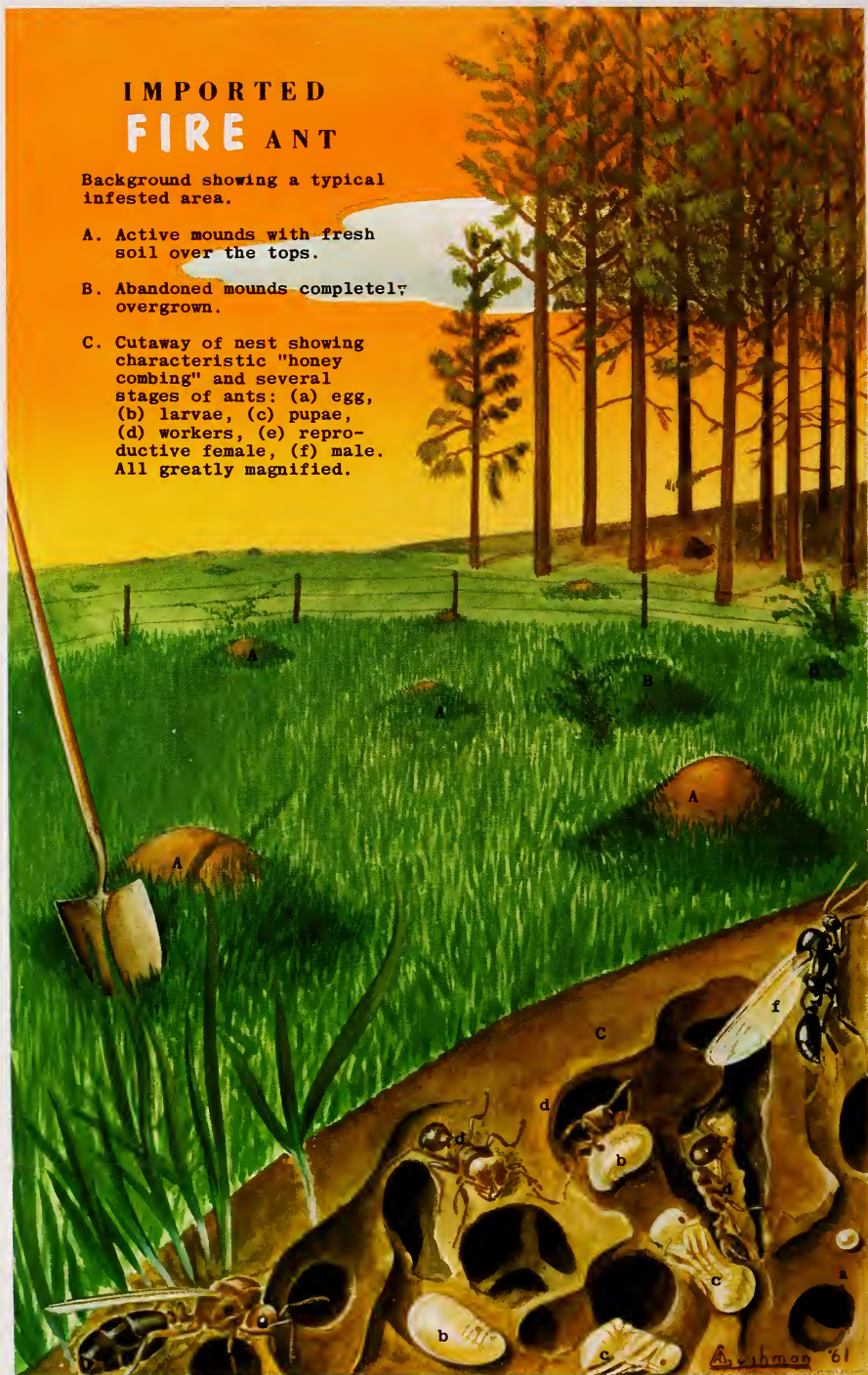
IMPORTED FIRE ANT

Background showing a typical infested area.

A. Active mounds with fresh soil over the tops.

B. Abandoned mounds completely overgrown.

C. Cutaway of nest showing characteristic "honey combing" and several stages of ants: (a) egg, (b) larvae, (c) pupae, (d) workers, (e) reproductive female, (f) male. All greatly magnified.



THE IMPORTED FIRE ANT

The imported fire ant is a serious pest of people, animals and crops in the South. Your Federal and State governments are trying to control it.

Imported fire ants look like ordinary ants, but there are great differences. When their mound is disturbed, these ants attack by sinking powerful jaws into the skin, then repeatedly thrust their poisonous stingers into the flesh. The stings cause long-lasting sores that sometimes leave scars. People who are allergic to the stings may require medical care.

Major losses from the imported fire ant are reduced efficiency of labor and machinery—losses that are hard to assess in dollars.

Ants choose cleared land, warm to the sun, for their mounds. This means that the most valuable land on a farm is most heavily infested. Improved pastures and hay fields are especially hard hit.

Farmers lose valuable time during seeding, fertilizing, and

harvesting of crops when they must detour around the mounds. They also find it difficult to hire workers to go into fields inhabited by these fiery little pests.

Imported fire ants directly damage some crops. On vegetable crops they suck juices from the stems of plants and gnaw holes in roots, stalks, buds, ears, and pods. They attack pasture grasses, cereal and forage crops, young corn, nursery stock, and fruit trees.

Fire ants may attack and kill newborn pigs, calves, sheep, and other animals; newly hatched chicks; and the young of ground-nesting birds.

The ants are not just a farm problem. Highway departments and railroad companies find fire ant mounds on their rights-of-way. Mounds in lawns, cemeteries, parks, playgrounds, school yards, and golf courses are eyesores. They make it hard to take care of the grounds. It isn't safe for young children to play around fire ant mounds.

WHAT WE DO

Your Federal and State governments try to control the imported fire ant with surveys to find it, quarantines to keep it from moving into new areas, and treatments with insecticide to kill it.

Surveys find the areas where the anthills are, how big these areas are, and how many anthills are in the area. Surveys must be made because the ants move often and build new mounds.

Fire ants can move to new areas on plants with soil attached and in loads of soil, sand, gravel, hay, sod, wood, and lumber.

Ways have been found to kill the ants in all of these materials. Safe and effective treatments make it possible to move them into uninfested areas without spreading the ants.

Properly used insecticides are the only practical means of killing imported fire ants.

Each area is studied to determine the proper method and timing for applying insecticide.

Aircraft are used to treat large, generally infested, open areas, and places not easily reached by other equipment.

A spreader mounted on a jeep is used to treat small blocks in easily accessible places. A hand spreader is used on isolated mounds.

Sometimes various combinations of aircraft and other methods are used.

Isolated mounds beyond the boundary of an infested area are treated first to keep the area as small as possible.

A bait now (1967) being used against imported fire ants is one of the safest insect baits ever devised. It has no harmful effect on people, livestock, fish, wildlife, or even bees. It contains the insecticide mirex, specifically designed for use against the imported fire ant.

Mirex bait is applied at the rate of 1.25 pounds of the 0.3 percent formulation per acre. At this

rate each acre treated receives only 1.7 grams or about 1 teaspoon of insecticide. Usually 2 applications spaced 4 to 6 months apart are required.

The bait is made of ground corncob grits saturated with the insecticide and soybean oil. It leaves no harmful residue in milk, meat, or on crops, and can be applied even to sensitive areas such as ponds or pastures.

Mirex bait is designed to take advantage of one of the oddities of ant life. The foraging worker ants bring food into the mound where it is first fed to the queen and ant larvae. Therefore, even if the bait does not kill all the workers immediately, treated fire ant colonies will eventually die out because no new generations can be produced.

Heptachlor, an effective and economical insecticide, is used occasionally by Federal-State officials to treat mounds in nurseries, at shipping points, and in other restricted areas where the treatment would not endanger people, livestock, or wildlife. Heptachlor should be used only under the close supervision of Federal or State officials.

All applications of insecticides by Federal and State officials to control the imported fire ant are closely supervised. When aircraft are used, the application is supervised from the air while the swath widths are marked by an electronic device or with special balloons. Radio communications coordinate operations.



WHAT YOU CAN DO

You can help kill imported fire ants. If you don't kill them, they may annoy and injure members of your family, lower the value of your land, reduce crop yields, and harm livestock, pets, and wildlife. They could spread throughout the South and westward to the Pacific Coast.

To help, you can—

- Buy and use some mirex bait to kill the ants on your own property.
- See your local plant-pest-control inspector before you move soil, wood, or plants from your farm.
- Tell your county agricultural agent or State entomologist about any fire ant mounds you see.
- Cooperate with officials and follow the instructions they give you when a control program includes your property.

PRECAUTIONS

Insecticides used improperly can be injurious to man and animals. Use them only when needed and handle them with care. Follow the directions and heed all precautions on the labels.

Keep insecticides in closed, well-labeled containers in a dry place. Store them where they will not contaminate food or feed, and where children and animals cannot reach them. Promptly dispose of empty insecticide containers; do not use them for any other purpose.

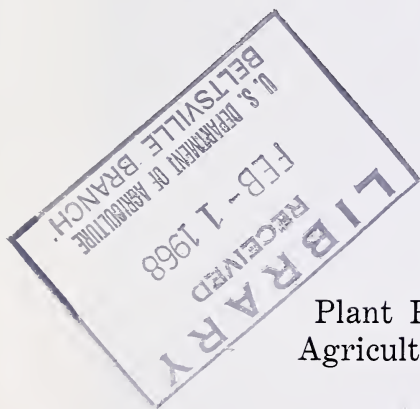
When handling an insecticide, wear clean, dry clothing.

Avoid repeated or prolonged

contact of insecticide with your skin.

After handling an insecticide, do not eat, drink, or smoke until you have washed your hands and face. Wash any exposed skin immediately after applying an insecticide.

Bury empty insecticide containers at a sanitary landfill dump, or crush and bury them at least 18 inches deep in a level, isolated place where they will not contaminate water supplies. If you have trash-collection service, thoroughly wrap small containers in several layers of newspaper and place them in the trash can.



Prepared by
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