



RED IMPORTED FIRE ANT (RIFA)

The threat: Fire ants (*Solenopsis invicta*) are considered the most invasive ant species worldwide because of the harmful effects they have on people and animals, infrastructure, agriculture, flora and fauna, and recreational activities.

These ants, which are native to South America, are aggressive and will repeatedly sting anything that appears a threat.



What it looks like

The fire ant is reddish-brown in colour, although some have a shiny, opaque black abdomen. Their size varies from 3 to 6 mm in length.

Nests

Nests are mounds of fine granular soil and are highly variable in size (from several centimetres across in young colonies, to nearly a metre wide and 10- 40 cm high). They are often built in sunny, open areas, sometimes against a wall or post or shrub. The ants will also build colonies in electrical boxes and the walls of home and other dwellings.

If a red imported fire ant nest is disturbed, ants swarm rapidly out and over the mound to defend the nest and sting anything nearby.

Stings

The sting of a red imported fire ant is painful (like a bee or wasp sting). Symptoms include intense burning and itching and a blister forms at the site of the sting within hours. This is followed by the formation of a white pustule within a days. In some instances, the sting can cause anaphylaxis.

IF YOU SUSPECT YOU HAVE FOUND OR BEEN STUNG BY RED IMPORTED FIRE ANTS:

- Do not disturb the nest (disturbance may cause the red imported fire ant to move a queen out of the nest to start a new colony).
- Call the BNZ pest and disease hotline number and report your sighting.
- If you are stung, do not panic. The stings, although uncomfortable, are not dangerous to most people.

However, the pustules can become infected if scratched, and on very rare occasions people may have anaphylaxis. If you are stung and have concerns, seek medical advice.

The New Zealand ant

An ant over 6 mm long will NOT be a red imported fire ant.

The vast majority of New Zealand ant species do NOT build mounds for nests. However, there is one other introduced species that may create small dust piles. These dust piles will always be small – less than 3 cm across.

Other New Zealand ants will NOT swarm out of the nest, or run away from being disturbed.

New Zealand ants do NOT sting, although some introduced ant species do bite. If bitten, the affected area will not form a pustule.



Report your sighting:

Call Biosecurity New Zealand's Exotic Pest and Disease hotline: **0800 80 99 66** or complete the online biosecurity reporting form www.report.mpi.govt.nz/pest

To find out more go to www.biosecurity.govt.nz