



## Safe treatments for Fire Ants

This is an educational service provided by Sheri Spencer Bachman  
Spencer Pest Services 864-232-2406 info@spencerpest.com

If you've spent any amount of time in South Carolina during the spring or summertime, you are no doubt familiar with fire ants - or at least the hills that dot countless yards across the state during their active season. Fire ants are notorious stinging ants that earned their name both from their fiery red coloration and the burning stings they give anyone unfortunate enough to wander into the vicinity of one of their colonies.

While typical black ant bites are painful, fire ant stings can be excruciating, especially in large numbers. They are also far more threatening, especially to those with allergies, and a large number of stings can even be fatal.

Unfortunately, if you're a homeowner in South Carolina, fire ant hills on your lawn are a part of life. They are simply too widespread to effectively prevent on your own - which is why it's important to familiarize yourself with the different methods available for treating fire ants once they find your lawn.

There are two primary methods used to treat fire ant infestations: one method focuses on treating the individual ant mounds on your lawn, and the other takes a large-scale approach by treating the entire turf and landscaped area across your yard to treat all of the ants that have found their way onto your property at once.

### **Mound Treatments**

Mound treatments are typically applied using a granular-type bait that is applied liberally around the perimeter of each mound. While foraging for food, fire ants will find the bait and take it back deep into the colony to be eaten and shared with other members of the ant hill.

The process ants use to break down and consume food they find is called trophallaxis. Ants consume their food and then regurgitate it within the colony in order to feed the other ants inside.

Mound treatments turn fire ants' feeding behavior against them. The bait consists of a stomach poison that is lethal to ants, but when instead of affecting only the foraging ants that pick up the bait, ants inadvertently spread it throughout the entire colony when they regurgitate it, eliminating all the ants inside the mound at once.

The primary benefit of individual mound treatments comes from their ability to eliminate the entire colony with one treatment. However, ants do have a natural defense against mound treatments in the form of budding. Budding is a process by which a queen and accompanying workers leave the current ant nest and walk to a new site to form a new colony. Through budding, even if the majority of the mound is killed off, the few surviving ants can still repopulate the yard, resulting in numerous smaller mounds springing up within a few days.

Due to budding, individual mound treatments are an ongoing process that must be applied on a regular basis to treat mounds as they appear.

There are numerous DIY mound baits on the market that can be effective in treating fire ants on your property so long as you keep up a frequent and consistent treatment schedule. Treat any mound across the property as it appears, and you will be able to keep your lawn protected.

You should take care when selecting a product to use for DIY treatments. Only use products that are specifically labeled for use on fire ants, and follow the application and storage instructions on the label to the letter. Otherwise you risk ruining your product or giving your yard an incomplete (and thus ineffective) treatment. For example, products such as Amdro require storage temperatures below 72 degrees; in the heat of South Carolina summers, storing this product in the garage or shed will ruin the bait and cause it to fail. Therefore, you should take into account not only what bait you're going to use but also how you're going to store it prior to making a purchase.

### **Over-Lawn Treatments**

Unlike mound treatments, over-the-lawn treatments take a holistic approach to fire ant control by focusing on the entire lawn instead of individual hills. This type of application uses a granular fire ant bait that is similar to mound treatments but is spread across the entire property using a spreader. On most lawns, this will be a hand spreader, but technicians may use a bigger machine spreader when working on large or commercial properties covering several acres.

Unlike mound treatments, over-lawn treatments address the problem of budding by ensuring that putting a layer of protection on the soil surrounding all the mounds present on the property. Fire ants will be unable to start new mounds on your property - though they may spread to your neighbors.

Because of its ability to counter budding, over-lawn treatments almost always give homeowners the best results and most effective treatment for fire ants. The downside of over-lawn treatments is that they are generally only available through a professional pest control provider; however, even this downside can be offset if the company provides a guarantee for service. With a service guarantee, even if the fire ants are able to bud in the days after treatment, most pest control providers will come back to retreat at no charge.