

Gregg County Office  
405 E. Marshall, Ste 101  
Longview, TX 75601  
903-236-8429

June 1, 2008

**NEWS RELEASE FROM THE OFFICE OF:**

***DENNIS SMITH  
COUNTY EXTENSION AGENT  
GREGG COUNTY***

**FIRE ANT CONTROL**

Fire ants cost Americans \$6 billion a year, including the cost of insecticides. The Two-Step Method and other approaches can lower that cost while reducing environmental damage and improving fire ant control. Knowing your options will allow you to make better choices to protect your family, pets and property.

Most people (about 80 percent according to one survey) try to control fire ants by treating the mounds. Mound treatments are expensive—up to \$2 or so per mound—and require lots of time and labor if you have much land to treat. With mound treatments, it may be easy to use too much insecticide, which can lead to environmental contamination if rain washes insecticide into lakes and streams. Mound treatments also can be ineffective. For one thing, some nests may go undetected. But even an area where every mound has been treated can soon be reinfested by fire ant colonies migrating from untreated areas or floating there on flood water. Also, deep-dwelling colonies that escaped mound treatment can quickly form mounds after a soaking rain. For most homeowners, it is usually more effective and less expensive to treat the entire yard with a product designed for broadcast application.

**The Two-Step Method goes like this:**

1. Make an annual or semi-annual broadcast application of a bait-formulated insecticide. Conventionally-formulated baits such as hydramethylnon, fenoxycarb, abemectin, Methoprene, Spinosad and others are applied at a rate of 1- to 1-1/2 pounds of product per acre. Periodic broadcast applications of fire ant baits provide roughly 90 percent suppression of ants when properly applied. A bait product can be broadcast over small to large areas using suitable hand-held or vehicle-mounted applicators. Speed and duration of ant suppression differs with the product selected.
2. About three to five days or more after bait application, apply individual mound treatments to "nuisance" ant colonies, such as those in sensitive or high traffic areas.

Otherwise, be patient and wait for the bait treatments to work. Hydramethylnon baits are relatively fast-acting, but colonies remaining active after six weeks are so have "escaped" the effects of the bait treatment and should be treated with an individual mound treatment. Colonies migrating into treated areas should be treated as needed. Hundreds of effective individual mound treatment products are available to choose from.

To be effective, baits must be fresh and applied when ants are actively foraging. To determine if the time is right for treatment, place a small amount of bait in the area to be treated and see if foraging ants remove it within an hour. Because ants collect bait and return it to the colony, very little insecticide is needed in this formulation. Baits are ruined by water, so do not water baits after application or apply them when rain is expected.

Fire ants can't be eliminated entirely because it's not possible to treat all areas that are infested. Thus, the goal of current integrated pest management (IPM) programs is to suppress fire ants as much as possible with biological control methods and use insecticides only where it is economically and environmentally justifiable to do so. There may not be one "best" method for fire ant control, especially in large areas. Your objective should be to find the method or methods that are most cost-effective and environmentally sound. In areas where these ants do not present problems, doing nothing is certainly one option.

Because control lasts longer when large areas are treated, consider participating in a community- or neighborhood-wide treatment program. These have been shown to improve control and reduce cost. If everyone participates by making coordinated treatments, ant colonies will not be able to migrate from property to property.

Additional information on fire ants is available on the Texas AgriLife Extension Service - Gregg County web page at [gregg-tx.tamu.edu](http://gregg-tx.tamu.edu)

*Dennis Smith can be contacted at the Gregg County Extension Office by e-mail at [dg-smith@tamu.edu](mailto:dg-smith@tamu.edu) or telephone at: 903-236-8429.*

Extension programs serve people of all ages regardless of socioeconomic level, race, color, sex, religion, disability, or national origin.