

In search of **FIRE ANTS**

Few things can earn a client's wrath faster than a return of these biting insects. BY DANIEL G. JACOBS



Robby Clemenzi smiles even after being bitten.

later, he finds one, brushes away the mulch from a bed, pokes in a finger and

pulls up a half dozen or so red imported fire ants scurrying furiously across his now-bitten digit.

He begins to pick them off one by one. "Can you imagine a small kid stepping into that?" he asks.

It's scenarios just like that that have lawn care professionals across the south from Virginia to Texas looking for the most effective way to deliver quick and long-lasting fire ant treatments to customers.

There are nearly 40 million people living in roughly 330 million-plus acres of land across the Southeast where

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It's 9 a.m. on a Friday morning, and the Orlando sun is already baking the grounds of the hotel outside the conference room.

"Ever seen a fire ant?" Robby Clemenzi, area sales rep for Bayer Environmental Science, asks the account manager for the public relations firm that helped organize the event. Clemenzi props open a door that leads to the hotel's pool and tennis courts, and begins to scour the well-manicured grass and surrounding area. A few short minutes

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CHANGES IN FIRE ANT TREATMENT

According to Charles Barr, Barr Research & Consulting, the approach to dealing with fire ants has changed over the years. Here's a look at a few of the differences.

OLD WAY

1. Individual mound control
2. Remedial response
3. Speed is most important
4. Product-centered



NEW WAY

1. Broadcast control
2. Proactive response
3. Duration of control and prevention are most important
4. Program-centered



Charles Barr explains the latest fire ant treatments.

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fire ants live, says Dr. Charles Barr, Barr Research & Consulting.

It's believed they arrived in the ballast of ships sometime during the 1920s, and became widespread starting with the rise of the highway system in the 1940s. Hawaii has yet to see them, but is afraid the pests could reach the state's shores.

Internationally, China and Australia also have fire ant problems. New Zealand has spent millions of dollars to deal with the issue, and has found only three mounds.

Research has found that about 15% of humans have a local allergic reaction, which can cause pain and discomfort. Of that population, about 2.5% suffer systemic allergies (anaphylactic shock), Clemenzi says.

Of the more than 300 million fire-ant-infested acres in the U.S., fewer than 500,000 are treated. Until last fall, homeowners treated nearly 75,000 acres themselves using a product called Over 'n Out. But the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency recently pulled the registration of that product — giving lawn care professionals a huge new market, Barr says. The product is still on the shelves and legal to use, but is no longer being manufactured. When it's gone, he points out, there will be no consumer-grade solutions to treat fire ants.

Clemenzi concluded his presentation to “biological service providers” by discussing how lawn care professionals can use science to affect fire ant biology to produce a healthy, safe and beautiful environment — at a profit, of course.

Both Barr and Clemenzi suggest using a combination of products. But, he advises, with about 150 products labeled for fire ant control, lawn care professionals need to sell their professionalism.

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