

TURFGRASS TRENDS

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ENTOMOLOGY

Red Imported Fire Ants Continue to Spread North and West

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Solenopsis invicta (Buren), the red imported fire ant, was accidentally brought into Mobile, AL in the ballast of ships from South America in the 1930s. Since its introduction, this species has spread throughout the southeastern United States and now continues to expand its northward and westward distribution into areas with mild climates and adequate moisture and food. The ants currently infest over 240 million acres and can be found throughout Puerto Rico, Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana and in portions of South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee, Arkansas, Oklahoma and Texas. In addition, infestations of the red imported fire ant were recently found in Fresno, Kern, and Orange Counties in California.

Fire ants disperse naturally through mating flights, through colony relocation over short distances or by floating to new locations in floodwater. Humans also assist in the distribution or movement into new locations through shipments of ant infested nursery stock, sod, soil, hay, pine straw or beehives. Despite quarantine efforts aimed at preventing the movement of fire ants, it is not uncommon to find that imported fire ants "jump ahead" of the natural distribution due to movement of infested products.



Large mound of the imported red fire ants.

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