

Red Imported Fire Ant (RIFA)

Solenopsis invicta

What are RIFA?

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

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

Where are RIFA?

Queensland

Fire ants were first detected in February 2001 at the Port of Brisbane and in the south western suburbs of Brisbane, South-east Queensland. Spread from the initial Brisbane detection led to infestations around the greater Brisbane area including Ipswich, Logan and Redlands. Isolated infestations have also been found in the Scenic Rim, Gold Coast and Lockyer Valley areas. Subsequent incursions were detected at Yarwun (2006 and 2013), Brisbane Airport (September 2015) and the Port of Brisbane (May 2016).

Fire ants have been declared eradicated from Yarwun,

The South-east Queensland and Brisbane Airport incursions are subject to nationally cost-shared eradication programs, while the eradication program for Port of Brisbane is funded by the Commonwealth.

New South Wales

Fire ants were detected at Port Botany, Sydney in November 2014 and have been subject to a successful nationally cost-shared eradication response.

The Port Botany incursion has been declared eradicated.

How do RIFA spread?

Fire ants spread naturally through mating flights and budding. A mated female (queen) can fly up to 2km, while a newly mated queen finds a suitable nesting site, sheds her wings and starts a new colony.

Humans can spread fire ants via:

- shipments of infested nursery stock, soil or other fire ant carriers
- materials and containers stored in fire ant biosecurity zones
- machinery that has been used to move soil.



Close up Fire Ant

The movement into South Australia of any host material including containerised plants, potting media, soil, organic mulch, turf, hay, straw, agriculture machinery or used containers is prohibited from Queensland unless certified.

What do RIFA look like?

Ants:

- Small 2-6 mm
- Variety of sizes within each nest
- Head and body are coppery-brown, abdomen is darker

Nests:

- No obvious entry or exit holes
- Come in various shapes and sizes
- Can be mounds or just some loose soil
- Can be found under and around logs, rocks and garden material

Behaviour:

- Aggressive, particularly near the nest
- Can inflict a painful sting
- 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)

What to do

- If you suspect you have RIFA, call the Exotic Plant Pest Hotline 1800 084 881 or email photos with a brief explanation and your contact details to PIRSA.biosecuritysa@sa.gov.au
- 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 a more serious reaction. If you are stung and have concerns, seek medical advice.

All photos courtesy of the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries



Fire ants vary in size 2 – 6 mm



Immature fire ant nest



Fire ant stings after 5 minutes

Report suspected detections to the Exotic Plant Pest Hotline.

