

Fighting The Constant Fire Ant Battle

Dear Plant Doctor: Please help. I have fire ants in my yard and I have tried everything to get rid of them. I do not like using pesticides but cannot tolerate these stinging pests.

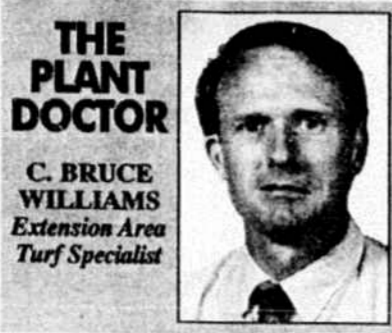
I want to get rid of fire ants forever. What do you recommend?
Calabash

ANSWER: I recommend you move. The Imported Fire Ant (origin: South America) was first reported in the United States (Baldwin County, Alabama) in 1929. Since that time scientists, farmers, and homeowners have been engaged in a battle of epic proportions, a battle which fire ants are winning. At one time, scientists did not believe that fire ants would be able to tolerate the winter temperatures encountered in North Carolina but now the pests are common in eastern North Carolina and have moved to south-side Virginia... and show no signs of stopping their march north.

Fire ants are pests for two reasons: (1) the sting of the fire ant is painful and often persists as a swollen area for several weeks. Some people are allergic and need medication when stung. (2) Fire ant mounds are unsightly and interfere with crop harvest or landscape maintenance operations. In addition, fire ants are changing the biological composition of native plant and animal life in ways scientists are just now starting to understand.

No one has been able to totally eradicate fire ants. The best you can do is to control the pest in your own yard. Quick, safe and effective control is possible when a few simple steps are followed.

Positive identification is the first step in effective fire ant control program. Fire ants vary in size from 1/8 to 1/4 inches long and may be reddish to dark brown. A gentle brush of the mound with one's foot or a stick will cause fire ants to actively "boil" out of the mound. The lack of such "boiling" action generally



THE PLANT DOCTOR
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means the mound is inactive or not infested with fire ants.

Selection of the correct insecticide is crucial to controlling fire ant infestations. Insecticides can be classified into two categories: baits and contact poisons. Baits will give excellent control if used during the spring and fall when ants are actively foraging for the colony. Examples of baits that will control fire ants when properly used include Amdro and Affirm. Baits typically eliminate active mounds of fire ants in 4 to 12 weeks. Baits work but you must be patient.

Contact poisons yield the quickest results (1 to 7 days) on active mounds during the summer months. Examples of insecticides that are labeled for fire ant control include Diazinon, Dursban, Orthene, and a host of synthetic pyrethrins.

The most common reason fire ant control fails is from incorrect application techniques. Do not disturb the mound before or after treatment! Mix liquid insecticides per label instructions. Apply the insecticide mixture to each mound. Check the mound in 5 to 7 days and retreat if necessary.

Biological control would be the ideal method of control but after nearly 60 years of intensive research Homer Collins of the USDA reports that "... all efforts to date indicate that no single organism is capable of inducing population suppression of the imported fire ant... Due to cost effectiveness, environmental con-

cerns, and other factors, the broadcast application of baits remains the preferred method of import fire ant control except in special, localized situations where mound drenches might be more appropriate."

I am sending you the publication "Imported Fire Ant Control" that I recently revised that includes the preferred methods and pesticides for fire ant control.

Dear Plant Doctor: I have wild mushrooms growing all over my yard. My neighbor is from Europe and frequently collects and eats wild mushrooms she finds in the woods. I have young children and worry that they may eat some poisonous toadstools. Is there anyway you can tell the difference between a poisonous and non-poisonous mushroom? Can I spray something to kill the mushrooms?

Wilmington
ANSWER: Contrary to folklore, there are no general rules or ways to separate edible mushrooms from poisonous mushrooms or to make poisonous mushrooms safe to eat. If you suspect one of your children or another individual has eaten poisonous mushrooms, then call a physician, the hospital emergency room, or the Duke Poison Control Center (800-672-1697).

If possible, collect a sample of the

suspected poisonous mushroom. If a telephone is not available or it will be a delay of 20 or more minutes, then induce vomiting with an emetic (e.g. syrup of ipecac). Collect the vomited material because it may be important in identifying the mushroom(s) ingested.

No pesticide is available that will control mushrooms in your yard. Fungicides used to control other types of plant diseases are not effective against mushroom producing fungi. I am sending you a newly revised copy of "Wild Mushrooms—A Potential Hazard".

Send your gardening comments or questions to the Plant Doctor, PO Box 109, Bolivia, NC 28422. PLEASE send a SASE if requesting a reply or publication.



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Optimists' Honor Student

South Brunswick Islands Optimist Club representatives Jana Martin (left) and president Joe Gore (right) honor William McLeod as the club's Student of the Month. McLeod is a student at West Brunswick High School, where he has been in JROTC for four years. He is a major in the organization, having earned 32 ribbons, won the VFW medal for military excellence, been awarded the expert M-16 rifle medal, earned a marksmanship badge for small-bore rifle proficiency, and served as battalion training officer. He also is a member of Bushmasters and Color Guard, Shallotte Volunteer Rescue Squad and Waccamaw Fire and Rescue Squad. He is the son of Keith and Nancy White.

Charles Town Dig Is Topic Of Upcoming Museum Talk

Archaeological findings at Charles Town, a 17th century settlement on the west bank of the Cape Fear River in the Town Creek area of Brunswick County, will be the topic of an April 8 lecture at the Cape Fear Museum.

Dr. Tom Loftfield, professor of anthropology at UNC-Wilmington, will discuss his archaeological findings at Charles Town and on the Caribbean Island of Barbados.

Charles Town was situated in the Town Creek area 330 years ago. One account placed the population at 800 colonists with individual

farms scattered 60 miles up and down the river. The settlement, consisting mostly of Englishmen from Barbados, endured for three years. Some of the settlers later helped found Charleston, S.C., in 1670.

Loftfield, who has worked on the Charles Town project since 1987, has presented papers to international gatherings of archaeologists in Barbados, Jamaica and numerous U.S. locations.

His lecture, which begins at 11 a.m., is free and open to the public. The museum is at 814 Market St., Wilmington.

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