



Red imported fire ant (RIFA)

At a glance

Features: Reddish-brown with darker abdomen, 2 to 6mm in length

Origin: South America - detected in QLD in 2001

Pathways: Containers or machinery or through movement of infested nursery stock or soil

At risk: Pose a serious social, economic and environmental threat.



Adult RIFA by Belinda Keen, NSW DPI

Why is it a concern?

Red imported fire ants pose a significant agricultural and environmental biosecurity risk. Their aggressive behaviour towards animals and their ability to severely injure livestock and native fauna has significant impact on biodiversity, ecosystem health and agricultural production.

They are highly-adaptable and well-equipped for survival in Australian conditions. When a nest is disturbed fire ants will repeatedly sting the human or animal intruder. Stings from fire ants are described as being extremely painful and may cause anaphylactic reactions.

Originally from South America, fire ants were found at a port facility in Port Botany NSW in November 2014 and are believed to have arrived on board a ship from Argentina.

Eradication programs undertaken at the Port Botany detection site have to date eradicated the ants from NSW, however ongoing surveillance is vital to ensure the ants do not spread. Fire ants were first detected in Queensland in 2001, although it is believed the ants had been in QLD for at least 20 years prior to detection. Eradication programs continue to run in areas of QLD.

Fire ants spread quickly and easily with queen ants flying up to a kilometre away to start new colonies. Fire ants on containers or machinery, or in nursery stock or soil, readily spread with the movement of goods and often over long distances. Due to their aggressive nature, fire ants have catastrophic impacts on the areas in which they inhabit.

How can you spot it?

Description

- Small ants of various sizes (2 to 6 mm in length)
- Reddish-brown in colour with a darker abdomen
- May be confused with the common coastal brown ant but can be best identified by its nest and aggressive behaviour if disturbed

Nests

- Nests often look like disturbed soil, mound of earth with few ants on outer surface
- Height up to 40cm, shape variable
- No obvious entry-exit holes
- Fire ants can also nest under logs, garden materials, hay or in electrical infrastructure



Report it!



If you think you have found brown a red imported fire ant (or any other unusual ant), report it through the **FREE MyPestGuide Reporter app** www.agric.wa.gov.au/apps/mypestguide-reporter. Select 'Make a Report' and choose 'Peri-urban Environmental Biosecurity Network' from the 'Send Report to' list.

Or report by calling the **Exotic Plant Pest Hotline on 1800 084 881** or email biosecurity@dpi.nsw.gov.au.