

Red imported fire ants - Frequently asked questions

About the treatment

Fire ant bait treatment involves spreading a corn grit mixture of soybean oil infused with an insect growth regulator. These chemicals are commonly found in dog and cat flea treatments and cockroach baits.

It is thinly dispersed across garden areas and verges, as well as hardstand areas and carparks. The bait treatment is not harmful to humans or animals as it is specifically targeted at fire ants.

The bait treatment is used according to the product label and permit from the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicine Authority to ensure safety to humans, animals and the environment.

What chemicals are used in the fire ant baits?

Fire ant bait is made up of corn grit soaked in a mixture of soybean oil and an insect growth regulator (IGR) – either S-methoprene or pyriproxyfen. S-methoprene is widely used in mosquito control programs, and pyriproxyfen is commonly used in dog and cat flea collars.

How does the bait treatment work?

It is thinly dispersed across garden areas and verges, as well as hardstand areas and carparks. Any foraging fire ants in the vicinity will collect the bait and take it back to the nest.

The IGR within the bait leads to the sterilisation of the queen ant, preventing her from producing any more worker ants. After the last adult workers have died of old age (approximately 3-4 months) the queen is effectively starved, and the nest will naturally die out.

The IGR also affects the reproductive ants by causing them to drop their wings and prevent them from being able to spread naturally through flight.

How much of each chemical is used?

On an average suburban residential block (approximately 500 m²) about 100 grams of bait will be used, which is around a half a teaspoon per metre². As the corn grits consist of 0.5% insecticide, very little active ingredient is distributed.

How safe are these chemicals?

The bait treatment is not harmful to humans or pets, as it is specifically targeted at fire ants. After the baits are distributed, they rapidly break down in direct sunlight.

The baits are used according to the conditions prescribed on the relevant product labels and permits from the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority APVMA; an Australian Government regulatory body) to ensure safety to humans, animals and the environment.

What precautions do I need to take?

The fire ant bait treatments pose no risk to public health or the health of pets. No specific health precautions by householders are considered necessary. It is quite safe to walk on ground that has been treated with the bait.

What should be done if I think someone has become sick from the baits?

Given the low toxicity of the baits, no adverse health effects would be expected from the bait. However, if you do think someone has become sick as a direct result of fire ant baits, first, ensure that medical advice and attention is sought from your family doctor. Please notify the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development by calling 9368 3080, following consultation with your doctor.

Do I need to take any precautions after my property has been treated?

For treatment to have the best chance of success, you **must not** water, mow or disturb your lawn or garden for 24 to 48 hours to allow for foraging fire ants to collect the bait. The active ingredient in the bait breaks down in sunlight in a matter of days.

Also be aware that restrictions apply to the movement of materials that could carry fire ants such as soil, mulch, manure, baled hay or straw, potted plants and turf.

Before moving materials that could carry fire ants, please visit our website agric.wa.gov.au/rifa

How regularly is this treatment required?

Properties within the designated treatment area are required to be treated up to 6 times during the next two years. Bait treatment is only conducted during the warmer months when the ants are actively foraging for food.

How much does treatment cost?

There is **no cost** to you when your property is treated for fire ants.

Why does my property require treatment if I don't have fire ants?

The baiting program for fire ants operates on all properties in known fire ant areas or areas that may be at risk of becoming infested. Immature nests could be on your property and not visible until they mature.

Further information on red imported fire ant can be found on the department's website agric.wa.gov.au/rifa

Should you have any further questions please contact the department on 9368 3080.