



# Kansas Plant Pest Alert

Kansas Department of Agriculture • Plant Protection and Weed Control • (785) 564-6698 • agriculture.ks.gov

## Red Imported Fire Ant

### What are they?

Red imported fire ants are stinging insects that belong to the same order as bees and wasps. This pest is established in much of the southern United States, including the states of Texas, Arkansas and Oklahoma.

In places where the red imported fire ant is established, it has become an important pest of agriculture, the natural environment and, in some cases, a risk to human health. Red imported fire ants attack in

*Pustules that result from fire ant stings are commonly mistaken for an infectious process. In fact, these lesions are induced by venom alkaloids and are sterile.*



large numbers and sting aggressively. Each ant is capable of stinging several times, and its venom has a high concentration of toxins that cause pain and swelling. Individuals who are allergic to bee and wasp stings will likely be allergic to red imported fire ant stings. Small children are especially vulnerable to fire ant stings.

### Where do they colonize?

Red imported fire ants like to build their mounds of loose soil in open, sunny areas. Mounds are typically

2 to 12 inches tall, and they can be in flower beds, the lawn, or in electrical boxes. If a mound is disturbed, the ants will often move the nest and build a new mound.

If you find a red imported fire ant mound, try not to disturb it and DO NOT attempt to treat it yourself. Improperly treated mounds take much longer to eradicate. Instead, call the Kansas Department of Agriculture at (785) 564-6698.

### Are they in Kansas?

The red imported fire ant has been found in Kansas several times. They have infested nursery stock and have been found in other outdoor plants brought into Kansas.

Currently, red imported fire ants are not known to be established in Kansas.

A native fire ant species, the southern fire ant, does exist in southwest Kansas. This ant is also aggressive and stings. However, its sting typically does not fill with pus, as is typical with the red imported fire ant.

In 2009 and 2010, we conducted a survey at live plant dealers at high risk of introducing the red imported fire ant, and none were found.



*Red imported fire ant mound.*

### What do they look like?

Identifying fire ants is difficult because they look much like ordinary ants. They are 1/8-inch to 1/4-inch long and reddish brown to black in color. Fire ants are probably best distinguished by their aggression and mounded nests.



### What if I find them?

Any ants that are extremely aggressive or sting when they are disturbed should be reported to the Kansas Department of Agriculture at (785) 564-6698.