

How can European fire ants be managed?

Many homeowners, business owners and public land managers currently use insecticides to curb this pest. Since populations seem to resurge after such treatment, this strategy appears to provide only short-term control. The Town is in contact with the University of Maine where currently they are researching the efficacy of a number of "least toxic" strategies for managing these ants, including insect growth regulators, boric acid baits, and biological controls.

What should you do if you suspect you have European fire ants in your yard?

If you suspect you have European fire ants in your yard, please e-mail the Parks, Recreation and Culture Department's Natural Heritage Section (naturalheritage@richmondhill.ca) with "European Fire Ant" in the subject line and your address in the body of the e-mail, so that we can confirm and identify populations and problem areas across the Town. Identifying European fire ants before their colonies spread is critical to avoiding a serious problem.

How can you control European fire ants on your property?

Indoor/Outdoor control: Fire ants can be controlled with boric acid bait traps and insect spray that can be purchased from your local grocery and hardware stores. Take care where you spray or place traps, especially if you have small children or if there is the potential of cross contamination. For extreme cases a pest control company should be consulted.



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For more information contact
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EUROPEAN FIRE ANT



Above Left: Adult European fire ant. Above Right: Adults tending larvae and pupae in nest. Below: Adult European fire ants on branch.



FACT SHEET

What you need to know about this new local pest.



Town of
RICHMOND HILL
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EUROPEAN FIRE ANTS

Recently, European fire ants have been spotted in the Greater Toronto Area, including Richmond Hill. Though these ants do not pose a serious threat to people, they can sting and can cause damage to the environment and that is why the Town of Richmond Hill has developed a strategy to deal with them. In cases where excessive ant populations are causing negative impacts to natural areas and adjacent property owners, Town staff will attempt to limit the population by using baits. As well, signage will be posted in affected areas and residents are reminded of the need for personal protection.

It should be noted however, that there is currently no known effective, long-term control method. It is the Town's hope that the European Fire Ant Management Plan will help minimize the spread of this invasive species to other natural areas and promote public and staff awareness. The Town will continue to monitor areas where ants are found. Here are some facts that you need to know about the European fire ant:

What are European fire ants?

European fire ants (also known as European red ants, *Myrmica rubra*) are very small red ants. The workers are about 4-5 millimeters long and the Queens are a little larger. These ants are only distantly related to the "true" fire ants (*Solenopsis* species) found in the southern U.S. and Latin America.

Why are they a problem?

European fire ants are a nuisance pest to people and a potential threat to the environment. They aggressively defend their territory and readily sting humans, pets and wildlife that move slowly or rest within the ants' large foraging areas.

The severity of reaction to the European fire ant sting varies from one individual to another, and with the location of the sting. Usually a sting results in an



inflamed red area from one to four inches in diameter, sometimes with a raised white area in the center. The sting causes an initial burning sensation and the affected area can remain sore for just a few hours, or a day or more.

When European fire ants move into new places, they can threaten native species of ants. In Europe, competition with other native ants and natural predation prevent the European fire ant from becoming a problem. But North America's native insects and wildlife did not co-evolve with this insect, and therefore have limited abilities to compete with it. European fire ants could displace native insect population if allowed to spread uncontrolled.

Where do European fire ants live?

European fire ants live in decaying logs, soil, under rocks and debris, and even in thick clumps of grass. The habitats in which these ants are found vary in different parts of their native range, from conifer forests in Russia to pasture edges in England. However in Richmond Hill, this ant appears to take advantage of habitats, including old fields, scrub/shrub and ravine settings. The ants do not nest in large mounds, but rather, in smaller communities in the root zone of vegetation. Their nests vary in size, from a few hundred to ten thousand workers. Nests usually have multiple queens that lay eggs.

How do European fire ants move to new places?

European fire ants move in two ways. First, people move ants from one location to another, sometimes across long distances. They can be moved in potted plants, mulch and similar materials from nurseries, or building sites. If an egg-laying Queen is moved, nests may be established at their new site. Second, is a process called "colony budding." A group of ants takes a Queen and moves away from their original colony to establish a new nest in a nearby site. In this way, infestations spread outward over time. The European fire ant was first discovered in the early half of the 20th century along the coast of Maine. It is likely that they were imported to North America via infested containerized plants brought from Europe. The University of Maine has confirmed that European fire ants were established in Maine before the 1950s and has reported that population densities and the number of infestation sites have increased considerably over the past decade. Since this ant is native to cold regions of Europe and Asia, climate has not prevented its spread into other areas and as a result it has steadily established in a northern direction. The discovery of the European fire ant in Canada is a very recent phenomenon with very few confirmed cases in the Greater Toronto Area.

