

# RED IMPORTED FIRE ANTS



*Solenopsis invicta*

## GENERAL INFORMATION

The Red Imported Fire Ant (RIFA) is the most recent of an increasing number of pests that have been introduced into Orange County. A native of South America, this fire ant was first introduced in the southeastern United States and eventually found its way to California and into Orange County. The colony or nest is very distinctive and easily recognized as a loosely compacted, finely granular dome (18 inches in diameter and six to ten inches high) of soil that somewhat resembles wet coffee grounds. Gopher mounds have larger (coarser) soil particles than RIFA mounds but may be similar in size to a RIFA mound. This ant is considered dangerous because, unlike most ants, this species delivers a venomous sting that produces immediate pain, a burning/itching sensation, and raised pustules that often last for several days. The venom is relatively toxic and potentially lethal to pets, wildlife, and sensitized humans. Because of the number and severity of their stings, residents of Orange County should be aware of the existence of this menace on their property and the potential hazards posed by accidental contact.

## DESCRIPTION

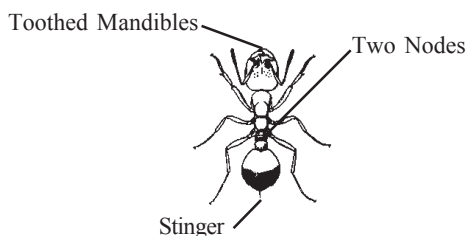
The Red Imported Fire Ant is a small to medium sized ant ranging from 1/8 to 1/4 inch in length. Each ant mound has ants of varying sizes within the colony. The ants are dark red in color with a dark brown shiny abdomen. They possess one pair of toothed mandibles for grasping the skin before stinging, and have two nodes located between the abdomen and thorax, characteristic of the species.

## CONTROL

For control measures, the District recommends contacting the Orange County Vector Control District. Inspectors from the District will come out and assess the situation and treat the area as needed.

## PRECAUTIONS

Residents are urged to leave Red Imported Fire Ant colonies undisturbed. The aggressive biting and stinging behavior is a defensive reaction for protecting food and water resources, and their nesting sites. When a mound is disturbed, large numbers of worker ants erupt from the surface of the mound to defend the colony. An unsuspecting victim can be rapidly covered with stinging ants within seconds.



**Actual Size**  
1/8 in. - 1/4 in.



**Red Imported Fire Ant**  
**Mound in a Lawn Area**

