

EUROPEAN FIRE ANTS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA



Since European fire ants were first found in BC in 2010, their presence has been confirmed in locations across the lower mainland, Fraser Valley and Vancouver Island.

WHY ARE THEY A PROBLEM?

The behaviour of the European fire ant changes according to the temperature: when it is warm and humid the ants become much more active

and are highly prone to swarm and sting. This species of ant forms dense colonies, severely compromising the use of yards, gardens and parks by residents, the public and animals.

The main method of introduction and spread is the movement and distribution of infested horticulture material, including **potted plants, soil and mulch**.



WHAT CAN YOU DO?

1. Deterrents

- Reduce watering and avoid/remove anything from area that traps heat and moisture

2. Stop the Spread

- Ensure landscaping supplies you bring to your property aren't infested with ants
- Do not move soil, mulch or plants from infested areas

3. Baits

- Baits may provide some control for fire ants
- 2% boric acid in a sugar solution is the best and is commercially available

4. Educate and Collaborate

- Talk to your friends and neighbours about fire ants and their impacts
- Work together to control fire ants and prevent their spread

Paving stones, wood on the ground, lawn ornaments or lawn clutter all trap heat and moisture.

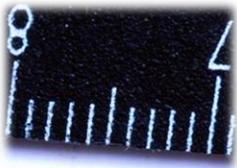


Credit: Susan Horton

IF STUNG...

The European fire ant injects venom under the skin that initially burns (30 minutes to 2 hours) then itches for a few days to a week.

If experiencing a stronger reaction than minor swelling, redness, discomfort, and itching: call HealthLinkBC at 8-1-1 for symptom advice, any time of the day or night. An extreme allergic (anaphylactic) reaction can be life-threatening and requires emergency care.



EUROPEAN FIRE ANT IDENTIFICATION

General appearance:

- very small (approx. ½ cm), thin, reddish-brown in colour,
- a constricted waist with two segments (most native ants to BC have a constricted waist and one segment),
- two backward-pointing spines on middle body section.



1. Collect specimen - following the instructions on Dr. Robert Higgins website: http://www.tru.ca/faculty/rhiggins/shipping_ants_for_identification.htm

2. Send ant to specialist to confirm species - to one of three locations below:

Preferred Location:

Plant Health Laboratory, Ministry of Agriculture.
Download and complete the necessary form at www.agf.gov.bc.ca/cropprot/labform.pdf.

Alternate Location 2:

Natural History Section, Entomology Dept, Royal BC Museum – attn: Claudia Copley
675 Belleville St, Victoria, BC V8W 9W2

Alternate Location 1:

Dr. Robert Higgins, Dept. of Biological Sciences
Thompson Rivers University
900 McGill Road
Kamloops, BC V2C 0C8

Shipment must include:

- Collection Location (town & street address);
- Collection Date (dd/mm/yy);
- Collector's first and last name.

- Personal information as well as the location of positively identified samples will be kept confidential. Positive samples will not be reported to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA), as this species is not a plant pest and is therefore not regulated under the federal Plant Protection Act.
- Specimens submitted to the Royal BC Museum will not be returned, and may be incorporated into the Museum collection, regardless of what the species turns out to be.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact your local government to report fire ant infestations or if you are seeking additional resources.

For more information on the European fire ant please visit the following websites:

- Dr. Robert Higgins, Thompson Rivers University Research webpage: www.tru.ca/faculty/rhiggins
- BC Provincial Government website: www.for.gov.bc.ca/hra/invasive-species/fire_ants.htm
- Invasive Species Council of BC: www.bcinvasives.ca