



Information

Bohart Museum of Entomology

No. 019

Fire Ants

Ants are social insects in the same order as wasps and bees. They generally live in large colonies with distinct caste systems. The queen mates with a male and all of the workers in the nest are sterile females. Colonies can have thousands of individuals, most of which are workers. Most of the pest ant species in California are introduced from elsewhere. They are typically ground-nesting ants that are scavengers, feeding on living or dead insects, nectar, honeydew or food available in the kitchen.

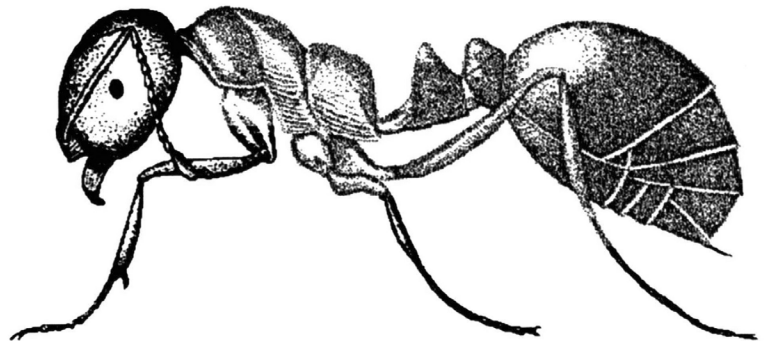
Native Fire Ant. The native fire ant, *Solenopsis xyloni*, is found throughout the southern states and in southern California. Workers are brownish red, with a brown to black abdomen, and range in size from 1/10 to 1/2 inches in length. Fire ant colonies are large, and workers come in several forms. They are vicious stingers. Colonies are subterranean and have irregular mounds of loose soil surrounding the entrance.

Native fire ants are omnivorous, and in addition to feeding on live and dead insects, they are particularly attracted to sugar, meat, grease and other fatty foods. They also tend aphids, mealy bugs and scale insects for the honeydew these insects produce.

Native fire ants are not often found in homes, and generally are not considered serious agricultural pests in California, although they are known to damage young citrus and pecan trees in orchards by girdling the young trees. They also are known to severely damage

vegetable seedlings on occasion. However, they are commonly confused with the imported fire ant, a major introduced pest.

Imported Fire Ant. The imported fire ant, *Solenopsis invicta*, was apparently introduced in ship cargo from South America before the 1920's. Since then it has spread throughout the southern states, and now is found throughout coastal southern California. This is a major quarantine pest for California.



Imported fire ants are red ants with a vicious sting. They are quick to attack humans, livestock and pets. Mature colonies can have over 100,000 individuals, and live in large, hard crusted mounds. These nests are generally established in open areas including schoolyards, agricultural land, and vacant lots. They can overwhelm an area with nest densities of 25-40 mounds per acre. They also are omnivorous, but are active predators and feed on insects and other small animals, completely denuding the surroundings of animal life, particularly ground-nesting birds and lizards.