

Bug-Wise



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Office: 1-662-325-2085

Termites and Fire Ants

Termites: Because termites swarm in the spring, this is the time of year many people learn their home is infested. Swarm season for eastern subterranean termites, a native species that occurs throughout the state, is pretty much over, though there will continue to be a few straggling swarms. Swarm season for the non-native Formosan termite, which now infests many areas in the southern part of the state, is coming up soon—Formosan termites usually swarm in early May.

Having swarmers emerge inside a building is a sure sign the building is infested, but you can't be sure a building is not infested just because you have not seen swarming termites. Termites are active 365 days a year, but they only swarm once a year, and it takes an old, well-established colony to be able to produce swarmers. Most termite infestations go undetected until they cause enough damage to become obvious, until damage is discovered while performing repair or renovation work, until detected during a termite inspection, or until swarmers are observed. This is why it is important to be sure your home is properly protected from these damaging insects.

Having your home treated by a professional pest control company and then maintaining the annual termite contract is the best way to protect your home from termites. Termite control is not a do-it-yourself project, but homeowners who understand termite biology, can recognize symptoms of termite infestations, and have a general understanding of how termites are controlled will be better prepared to choose and work with a pest control company to assure their home is adequately protected.

Extension publication 2568, *Protect Your Home from Termites*, provides information on the biology and distribution of the two major termite species occurring in our state. It also tells how to recognize signs of termite infestation, discusses methods of controlling termites, and tells how to choose and work with a pest control company. This publication also provides answers to many of the key questions homeowners have about termites and termite control. You can obtain a copy of "Protect Your Home from Termites" from your local county extension office, or you can find this on the internet by going to www.msucares.com, clicking on "Publications" (upper right hand corner of home page) and searching for "Termites".

Termite Training Video Conference: On Thursday, May 6, beginning at 5:30 PM, many county extension offices will be hosting an interactive video training on *How to Protect Your Home from Termites*. If you would like to attend this free training, check with your county extension office to see if they, or perhaps an adjoining county, are offering the conference. The program will devote 45 to 50 minutes to providing information on termite biology, how to identify swarmers, how to recognize signs of termite infestation, and how to control termites. The remainder of the program will be devoted to questions from the viewing audience.

Fire Ants: Treating for fire ants is a bit like keeping the house cool in the summer. If you wait till the inside temperature reaches 95 degrees to turn the air conditioner on, you're going to get hot and sweaty, and it is going to take a while to cool the house to a comfortable temperature. If you wait till you have dozens of fire ant mounds in the yard to begin treating, you are going to have dozens of fire ant mounds in your yard and it is going to take a while to get rid of them. Fire ant control is best done preventively.

Timely and proper use of granular fire ant baits is the key to successful fire ant control. When used properly, baits are affordable, quick and easy to apply, safe to pets and children, and effective. The only real negative associated with fire ant baits is that most are slow-acting, and it can take one to two months to see the full effects of a bait treatment. This is why fire ant baits need to be applied preventively. If you don't want to have a lot of big fire ant mounds in your yard, you have to treat before you have a lot of big fire ant mounds in your yard! In rural areas it is usually necessary to treat at least three times per year: around Easter, around Independence Day, and around Labor Day. In urban areas you may be able to get by with fewer treatments.

Baits work best when they are broadcast over the entire yard. Trying to treat individual mounds with baits does not work nearly as well because for every large mound you can see, there are many smaller colonies that are not yet large enough to be noticed. You can't treat these small colonies individually because you can't find them. Even if you kill the large mounds, the small colonies will quickly grow larger and replace them. When bait granules are broadcast over the whole yard, they are picked up by workers from the large mounds and by workers from the small mounds, carried back to the colony and fed to the immature ants and the queen, resulting in better long-term control.

Baits don't give 100% control and you will probably have a few mounds that appear in the yard despite your preventive bait treatments. Keep a can of one of the dry fire ant mound treatments on hand to spot treat these problem mounds, or, if you need to kill the mound quickly, use one of the liquid drench treatments and be sure to use enough drench to soak the mound thoroughly (takes 1 to 2 gallons per mound, depending on size).

What are the names of these bait treatments and exactly how are they applied, and what are the products used to spot treat mounds that survive the bait treatments? Extension publication 2429, Control Fire Ants in Your Yard, provides detailed answers to these and other questions about fire ant control. You can get a copy of this publication from your local county extension office or you can access it on-line by going to www.msucare.com, clicking on "Publications" and searching for "fire ants".

For information on controlling fire ants in pastures see extension publication 2493, Control Fire Ants in Pastures, Hayfields, and Barnyards. Baits are the key to controlling fire ants in these situations as well, but fewer baits are labeled for use in these specialized situations. Publication 2494, Control Fire Ants in Commercial Fruits, Nuts, and Vegetables provides similar information about which baits to use around edible food crops.

Blake Layton, Extension Entomologist

This information is for educational and preliminary planning purposes only. Brand names mentioned in this publication are used as examples only. No endorsement of these products is intended. Other appropriately labeled products containing similar active ingredients should provide similar levels of control. Always read and follow the insecticide label.