

PEST ALERT: A new insect threat in Virginia

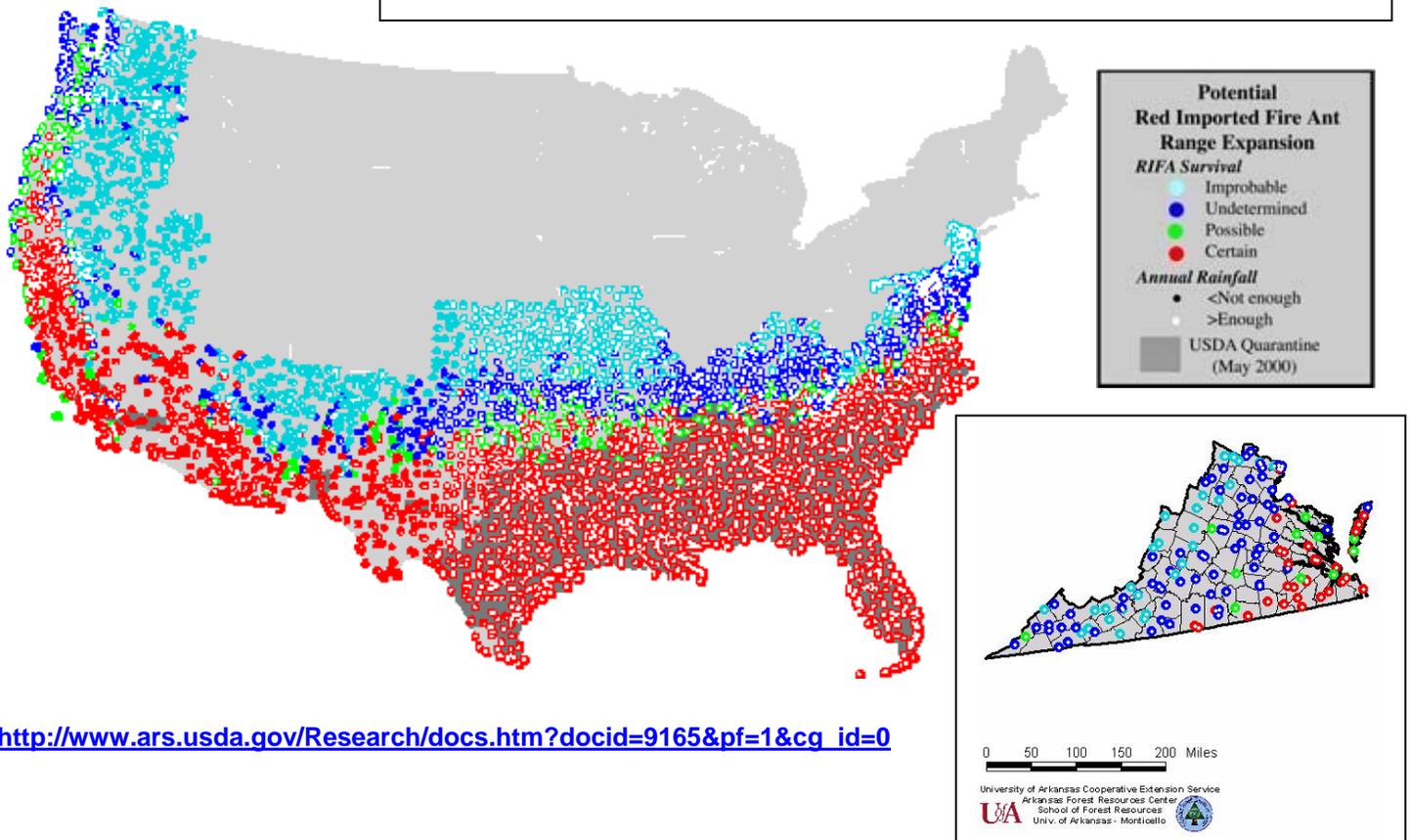


Peter B. Schultz, Entomologist, Virginia Tech, Hampton Roads AREC, Virginia Beach, Virginia

Red Imported Fire Ant (RIFA)



A resource for Extension agents, commercial pest control operators, homeowners, landscapers, golf course personnel, and other grounds professionals in the Commonwealth of Virginia



http://www.ars.usda.gov/Research/docs.htm?docid=9165&pf=1&cg_id=0

Red Imported Fire Ants: *Solenopsis invicta* Buren

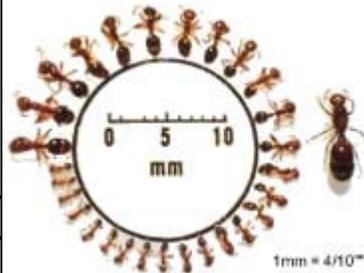
Residents of southeastern states have been battling red imported fire ant (RIFA) infestations since their accidental introduction into Mobile, Alabama, in the early twentieth century. The RIFA are native to Brazil, and it is believed that they arrived in Alabama during the 1930s. They can now be found in more than 13 states from the southeast across the lower United States all the way to California. They are still expanding their range and the US Department of Agriculture has released a map of RIFA's invasive potential.



Invasive RIFA are extremely aggressive and if their mounds are disturbed, they will stream rapidly out of the mound and attack. The ants bite first with their mandibles (chewing mouthparts) and cling to the skin. The ant then uses the stinger in its abdomen to inject venom into the victim. The venom immediately causes a painful burning sensation. White pustules often form within 24 hours and can take 10-14 days to heal. RIFA is capable of stinging multiple times in rapid succession.

Ant Identification and Biology

iStock video
[NOTE: video cannot be pasted into a Word document. Link below will allow you to view video.]
http://www.istockphoto.com/file/closeup/object/4479727_red_ants.php?id=4479727



RIFA adults vary in size with minor workers being about 2mm long, majors workers up to 6mm long, winged males and winged females and queens which are about 9mm long. This range of ant sizes is a useful diagnostic characteristic..

How can I tell if I have fire ants?



A guide from Texas A & M University

RIFA worker ants and queen. Arranged in a circle are majors (the largest workers), media (medium-sized workers) and minors (the smallest workers). Minors comprise the majority of worker ants in a colony. A queen is displayed to the right.
Source: Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology

If you suspect that you have found an infestation of RIFA, contact the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) at 804-786-3515 or your local [Virginia Cooperative Extension \(VCE\) office.](#)

[Fire Ants in Chesapeake, Virginia](#)

[Managing Red Imported Fire Ants in Virginia](#)

Fire Ant Information



A large amount of information is available on the web using the Imported Fire Ants web site of the eXtension search engine. The Fire Ant Community of Practice in eXtension has consolidated access to regional (multi-state) publications, fact sheets video clips, FAQ, and a box to submit individual questions for routing to specialists.