



Coming Events

Thurs., Oct. 8th 10:00a
Houseplants

Thurs., Oct. 22nd 10:00a
Winter Resident Birds

Thurs., Nov. 5th 10:00a
Planting Trees and Shrubs

October 1st - 31st
4-H Fall Plant Sale—click picture for info:



You can register online for any of the Think Green Thursdays classes here:
<https://alamance.ces.ncsu.edu/>

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These Hills are Alive



I spend a fair amount of time traveling around the county and in the last 30 days or so I have seen a large increase in the number of visible fire ant mounds. The fire ant mounds can be quite large and are easily identified. Those fire ant colonies have been there for a while, but because of the recent cooler temperatures and rain, the ants have become more active and the mounds have become much larger. This has led to an increase in the number of calls we have received about fire ants.

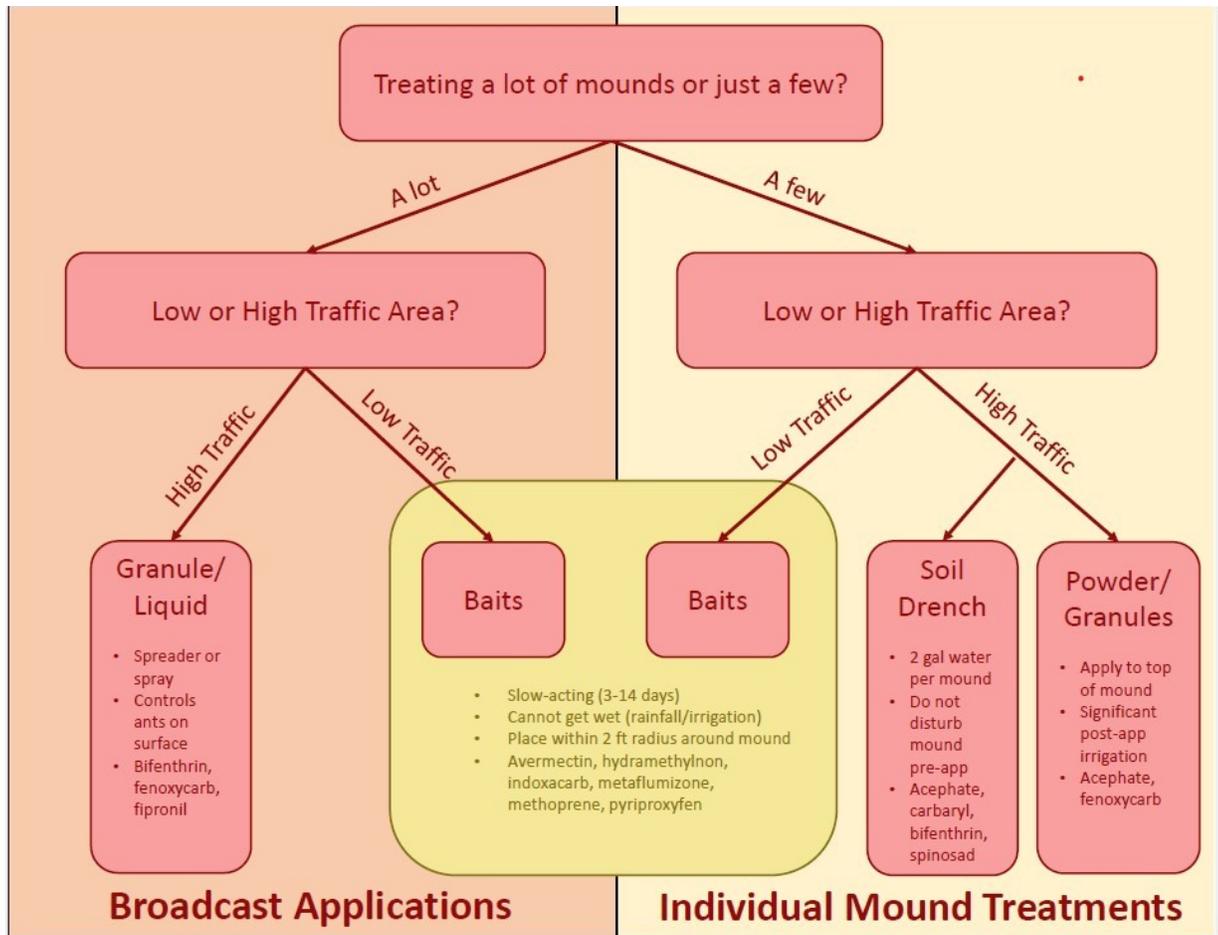
Unfortunately, fire ants are here to stay. While they were first found in the southern part of the county—and there are many more colonies there—they have moved into the northern part of the county in the last few years.

Since there are no predators of these insects in our area, and no mechanical means for getting rid of them, chemical control is currently the most effective approach for combating fire ants.

Actual size may vary, but averaging less than 1/2", the red imported fire ant or "RIFA" (*Solenopsis invicta*) is equipped with pinching mandibles as well as a venom-loaded stinger for a painful double whammy.



Here is a guide that will help you decide which course of action is best for your situation, with recommendations of insecticides for each use.



There are pros and cons to each type of control method. I think that in a high traffic area, the soil drench with a contact insecticide is your best bet. The insecticide drench works very quickly, but will not kill all the ants in the mound. The survivors will establish a new colony close by, hopefully out of the high traffic area. The key is to apply enough solution to move the insecticide deep into the mound. People who have tried this method unsuccessfully usually have not used a sufficient volume of the insecticide solution.

A general recommendation is to use at least one gallon of drench per six inches of mound diameter, so it may take several gallons of insecticide solution for an average sized mound. That can be difficult to do with a five-gallon bucket or a backpack sprayer. On the Buster Sykes Demonstration Farm, I have used a 25-gallon sprayer on the Gator. I removed the sprayer wand so the solution flows out of the hose faster and the volume of the sprayer allows me to treat more mounds with fewer refills. That still is very time consuming with a large number of mounds.

After a couple of years of doing individual mound treatments, I felt like I was not getting the control I needed, so I decided to try a bait application. While you can do an individual mound drench about anytime, a bait application must be timed very carefully. You need to be sure the ants are foraging and will pick up the bait. The easiest way to tell if the ants are foraging is to place a few potato chips close to the mound. If there are ants on the chips within 30 minutes, it is a good time to apply the bait. You also need to consider the weather. Rain or a heavy dew will spoil the bait. Ideally the ants should pick up the bait the same day it is applied.



Use potato chips to check for fire ant foraging activity. They will find the chips within 30 minutes if they are actively foraging.

The baits work slowly, but can be more effective because they target the colony queen. Last spring, I applied a fire ant bait to the orchard and the neighboring field to see what would happen. I scouted both areas this week and did not find a single colony. I am now convinced that a fire ant bait, properly applied, is the answer to my fire ant problem in the orchard.

If you have any questions about fire ants or any other gardening topic, please give me or Chris a call.

NC STATE

Extension Master Gardener



October Garden Tips

Expect the first frost around the middle of October. Before that night, bring in houseplants that have summered outdoors. Inspect them for uninvited guests, such as insects or snakes, and place the plants in a bright spot for the winter. Also on your “to do” list before frost: Harvest sweet potatoes, gourds and winter squash. Pick green tomatoes and wrap them individually in newspaper to ripen at room temperature.

Think spring when in the vegetable garden this month. This is a great time to till in compost and lime and any other nutrients and get them working over the winter. You’ll be ready to plant those sugar snap peas when February 2021 rolls around.

Cold-loving annuals can be planted from seed now. Sweet peas, poppies, Bells of Ireland, forget-me-nots and larkspur are just a few that can’t take the heat but shine when there’s a chill in the air. Keep in mind that pre-emergence herbicides will also prevent seeds of desired plants from germinating.

Take cuttings from woody herbs, dip in rooting hormone and plant in moist, well-drained medium. Lemon balm, oregano, sage, rosemary, tarragon and thyme are all good candidates for your windowsill garden.

Dig, divide and re-plant spring and summer-blooming perennials now. Daylilies and hostas will benefit from this attention, and October is the best month to divide peonies.

Fall is the best time to plant trees and shrubs. The plants will have two seasons to establish a strong root system and be better able to withstand the worst of summer. Dig the planting hole at least twice as wide, but no deeper than the root ball of the plant. Loosen a tight root ball and plant just a little high to allow for settling. Check for good drainage and water plants thoroughly as you backfill. To see how it’s done, attend our virtual Think Green Thursday class on November 5th. Register [HERE](#).

Begin planting spring-flowering bulbs such as tulips, daffodils, crocus and hyacinths as soon as soil temperatures drop below 60 degrees. Stick with the daffodils (*Narcissus* species) group and you can forget about deer and voles munching on your hard work.

For a great lawn without excessive mowing, feed established cool-season lawns just three times – September, November and February (loosely and easier to remember—Labor Day, Thanksgiving and Valentine’s Day). Apply 1 pound of actual nitrogen per 1,000 square feet of lawn area at each feeding.

Asoil test will help you determine whether you need other nutrients besides nitrogen (the NCDA Soils Lab doesn’t test for nitrogen, as this nutrient is water soluble and is presumed to be zero by the time you fertilize). Phosphorus and potassium are far less soluble. The soil test will help you decide which kind and how much fertilizer to apply, and the test is still free this month!

Arbor Gate Plant of the Month



Beautyberry

Callicarpa americana

Callicarpa americana offers up a graceful, open habit clothed in green from spring through summer. Dainty shell-pink flowers hug the stems in July, barely noticeable amidst the green. Then in September, berries begin to ripen and this reticent native bursts forth with a brilliant October display. Each arching branch is clothed in berries of a color that all but defies description. Electric violet is the closest I could come when searching for the right words. The berries persist until the birds claim them.

Give American Beautyberry full to part sun and ordinary garden soil. If your soil is rich and moist, make sure to give this plant plenty of room to stretch out to its full height of six feet and width of ten feet. Prune severely in late winter for best berry production; berries are produced on new growth.

Beautyberry is also available in a white variety, a cooling foil to the sizzle of the standard.

Read more here: <https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/callicarpa-americana/>

