

FBMG Help Desk
Question of the Week

I have fire ants in my compost! Why and how do I get rid of them?

Lets take a look.



Why Are They Here?

Ants may invade your compost pile for several reasons



Why fire ants most often invade compost bins:

- The pile is too stagnant - you need to turn the pile more frequently
- The pile is too dry - lack of moisture can slow down the composting process
- The pile has not reached proper temperature - a compost pile should reach higher temperatures early in the cycle to discourage fire ants

Maintaining a healthy compost bin improves decomposition.

Are They Harmful?

Lets take a look

Ants in your compost pile are not necessarily a bad thing.

Fire ants, on the other hand do tend to pose a problem

Native ants in your compost can be a good sign as they bring fungus and microorganisms that enrich the compost with potassium and phosphorus



Conversely, **fire ants** do sting & can be overly invasive.

If you see an overabundance of ants, it is a strong indication that something is missing from your compost - moisture or sufficient temperature

How To Remove the Ants

Once you have identified the presence of fire ants, you want to remove them in a way that does not endanger you, your compost or your garden

Here are some tips on removing the invading fire ants without damaging the rest of your compost or garden:

- *Remove the nest with a clean spade or shovel, trying to remove the queen if possible.*
- *Treat the soil you just removed with boiling water - use extreme caution as this method can be dangerous to you and your plants*
- *Most baits and poisons are **NOT** rated for use within a garden, so be sure to apply baits only around the perimeter, and follow all label directions exactly.*
- *If you find fire ants in your **finished** compost, you can spread the compost in a thin layer on a tarp in direct sunlight and leave it there to dry. The ants will bail out quickly.*

Tips on reducing the likelihood of introducing fire ants:

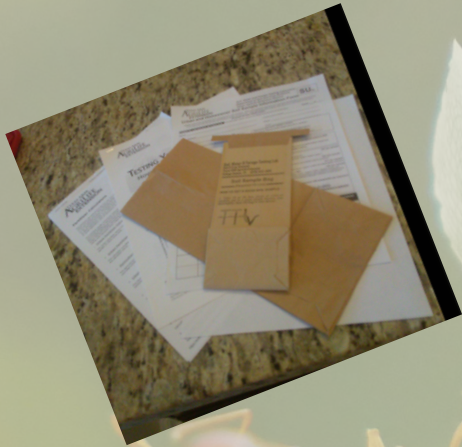
- *Be sure to add water every 10-14 days*
- *Carefully inspect anything you add to your pile - soil, woody parts and plant debris sometimes carry foraging ants and you may mistakenly introduce them to your pile.*
- *Be sure your compost pile is **ACTIVE** - turn it regularly and maintain the proper temperature*



Soil! It's where plants live!

***Composting is a wonderful way to to improve the soil
and lower the carbon footprint.***

***Amending the soil can alter it so remember to;
Have your soil tested.***



It is easy and well worth the effort.

go to soiltesting.tamu.edu

***Print the Urban Soil Submittal Form (1 form per sample)
soil submittal form urban 2023 (tamu.edu)***

fill it out and follow the directions on the page 2 and below

***The nutrients in the soil are taken up by the plant, however sometimes the plant isn't
able to take up the nutrients due to incorrect ph or even it is taking up the nutrients
one or more or missing. A soil test can help identify these issues.***

***The soil Analysis Report will show the current levels of
nutrients as provide fertilizer recommendations of N-P-K***

***All actions to improve soil can then become more
deliberate.***



Want to learn more about Composting?

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service in Fort Bend County, along with the Fort Bend County Master Gardeners presents
Grow Your Own



Grow Your Own 2023 (fbmg.org)

Video of the class on
Composting – September 9
is available

<https://fbmg.org>
<https://fortbend.agrilife.org/grow-your-own/>

Composting

- can be a fun and rewarding activity.
- advantages include a healthier garden and less yard waste going to a landfill.
- Want to learn how to make compost using items from your kitchen, yard, and gardens?

You can find the video for it and other classes at;
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCLcDNR8RV6MJld_RAziaJvA

***Do you have questions
about your home
landscape and plants?***

***Contact the Fort Bend
Master Gardener Help Desk***

***Email:
FortBendmg@ag.tamu.edu***

***Phone:
281-341-7068***

***The Help Desk is manned
Monday thru Friday,
9am-Noon***

***Keep fire ants away from compost piles,
vegetable gardens | CAES Newswire (uga.edu)
Managing Fire Ants for Specific Sites | Texas
Imported Fire Ant Research and Management
Project (tamu.edu).***

***Invertebrates of the Compost Pile - Cornell
Composting***

***.Ants In Compost Pile - Should I Worry? - The
Scientific Gardener***

***7 Solutions to Common Compost Problems - UC
Master Gardeners of Monterey Bay - ANR Blogs
(ucanr.edu) 7 Solutions to Common Compost
Problems***

How do we keep ants away from a compost bin?

***Can we use a line of baking soda around the
bin? (lacounty.gov).***

***Quiz/FAQ - Sarasota County - University of
Florida, Institute of Food and Agricultural
Sciences - UF/IFAS (ufl.edu) Controlling fire
ants in sensitive areas - Insects in the City.
(tamu.edu).***

***Composting_| NC State Extension Publications
(ncsu.edu).***

