

One-stop Shop Opens on Extension Fire Ant Web Site



Blake Layton

By Patti Drapala

The Mississippi State University Extension Service has launched a one-stop information shop on the MSUcares.com Web site focusing on imported fire ants.

Extension entomologist Blake Layton developed the site located at <http://www.MSUcares.com/insects/fireants>. He grouped content according to various control situations: home lawns; home gardens; organic control; indoor invasions; commercial sod and nursery stock; pastures, hay fields and barnyards; commercial fruit, nut and vegetable operations; and commercial turf (golf courses, athletic fields and public landscapes).

"Extension professionals address numerous questions and complaints about imported fire ants," he said. "While fire ants are a common problem, outbreaks of these pests occur in many different situations and require specific management techniques."

Layton divided information on the life cycle of imported fire ants into sections on facts, biology, stinging, control, tips for baits and identification of ant species in the Southeast.

"We included biology information because it helps people understand how and why certain control methods work," Layton said.

The identification section is linked to a Web page created by MSU entomology illustrator Joe MacGown. The link contains information on more than 150 ant species in Mississippi.

Layton developed the site's content during 6 weeks of intense writing and research. He enlisted help from colleagues in composing photographs and graphics that would reflect important control concepts.

"Imported fire ants are probably the most common insect pest in Mississippi," he said. "We created the site to help consumers, professionals and commercial operators manage imported fire ant populations in their particular situations."

Site visitors can click on a link to the U.S. Department of

Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service's quarantine map showing the infestation of the fire ant across the United States. The federal quarantine requires plants produced in infested areas to be treated for imported fire ants before being shipped to noninfested areas.

"Sod farmers and nursery operators are not allowed to sell their material if it is infested with imported fire ants," said Extension area horticulturist Wayne Porter. "This Web site provides a one-stop reference to address imported fire ant control strategies specific to a producer's operation."

The site debuted the first week of February and already has assisted many individuals dealing with problems that imported fire ants cause.

"Having a comprehensive site on imported fire ants will allow Extension staff to serve more people who have control problems," said Wayne County Extension agent Allen McReynolds.

"When one person has an outbreak, others have them, and everyone wants help."

Smith County Extension agent Jeremy Maness said the Web site provides an advantage in managing imported fire ant problems.

"We now can tell our clients with Internet access to go to the MSUcares.com Web site and get up-to-date information on control," he said.

Copiah County resident Kelly Parks, a member of the Adams County Master Gardeners, said a horticultural professional told her about the site. She said she plans to pass along the site's address to other people she knows.

"Including all of the information on imported fire ants in one location is much easier than trying to search for it," she said. "It's also going to be easier to remember one Internet address than to try to recall several."