



Urban Harvest

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Molasses Makes Fire Ants Move Out

Pat Ploegsma, reprinted from Native Plant Society of Texas News
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Have you ever started planting in your raised beds and found fire ant highrises? Are you tired of being covered with welts after gardening? Put down that blowtorch and check out these excellent organic and non-toxic solutions.

Malcolm Beck, organic farmer extraordinaire and owner of Garden-Ville Inc., did some experiments that showed that molasses is a good addition to organic fertilizer (more on fertilizer in the next issue). When using molasses in the fertilizer spray for his fruit trees he noticed that the fire ants moved out from under the trees. "I got an opportunity to see if molasses really moved fire ants. In my vineyard, I had a 500 foot row of root stock vines cut back to a stump that needed grafting. The fire ants had made themselves at home along that row. The mounds averaged three feet apart. There was no way a person could work there without being eaten alive! I dissolved 4 tablespoons of molasses in each gallon of water and sprayed along the drip pipe. By the next day the fire ants had moved four feet in each direction. We were able to graft the vines without a single ant bothering us."

This gave him the idea for developing an organic fire ant killer that is 30% orange oil and 70% liquid compost made from manure and molasses. The orange oil softens and dissolves the ant's exoskeleton, making them susceptible to attack by the microbes in the compost, while the molasses feeds the microbes and also smothers the ants. After the insects are dead, everything becomes energy-rich soil conditioner and will not harm any plant it touches. It can be used on any insect including mosquitoes and their larvae.

Break a small hole in the crust in the center of the mound then quickly!!! pour the solution into the hole to flood the mound and then drench the ants on top. Large mounds may need a second application. Available at Garden-Ville Square in Stafford, it has a pleasant lemonade smell.

According to Mark Bowen, local landscaper and Houston habitat gardening expert, fire ants thrive on disturbed land and sunny grassy areas. "Organic matter provides a good habitat for fire ant predators such as beneficial nematodes, fungi, etc. Other conditions favoring fire ant predators include shading the ground with plantings, good soil construction practices and use of plants taller than turfgrasses." He recommends pouring boiling soapy water over shallow mounds or using Ascend™. "Ascend is a fire ant bait which contains a fungal by-product called avermectin and a corn and soybean-based grit bait to attract fire ants. Ascend works slowly enough to get the queen or queens and it controls ants by sterilizing and/or killing them outright."

Malcolm Beck also did some experiments with Diatomaceous Earth - DE - (skeletal remains of algae which is ground into an abrasive dust) which confirmed that DE also kills fire ants. He mixes 4 oz. of DE into the top of the mound with lethal results. According to Beck, DE only works during dry weather on dry ant mounds. Pet food kept outdoors will stay ant free if placed on top of a tray with several inches of DE.