Before the chemical pushers started throwing Diazinon, Dursban, Myrex and Orthene at these insects, they weren't much of a problem. The queens were territorial, there was only one queen per mound and there were very few mounds per acre. After the toxic chemical assault, the ants altered their behavior so that there are hundreds to thousands of queens per mound and large numbers of mounds per acre – except on organic sites. Here's an organic program that actually works to control this man-made problem.

Preventative maintenance - It's important to understand that first the fire ant issue is a man-made problem.
1. Increase biodiversity. Fire ants are more of a problem in new neighborhoods than in older neighborhoods, where there is a more stabilized ecosystem. When fire ants are forced to compete, they become less of a problem. We must do our part to encourage nature.
2. Treating the lawn spring and fall with nematodes. Treat after sunset and follow-up with ½ inch of irrigation. Nematodes are live microscopic worms and need to be applied at the highest recommended rate and in a manor to ensure their survival.

Individual Mound Treatment
3. Treat individual mounds with 1 1/2 ounces of citrus (such as **Orange Oil**) and a few drops of soap as a wetting agent per gallon of water. Treat each mound with one gallon of diluted mixture.

Large area Treatment Program or Bad Infestations
4. When large areas have bad infestations of fire ants, the next step up from the nematodes and citrus drench is applying baits on the whole property at 1 1/2 lbs. per acre and one teaspoon of bait per mound. The baits we recommend are the ones containing abamectin because it is derived from a soil microorganism. At low concentrations, abamectin acts as an insect growth regulator and when used on individual mounds, it is a stomach poison. Baiting should be done in the spring and fall during times of active ant foraging. Test the timing and the bait's palpability by applying a small amount to individual mounds and watch for a quick uptake. For mounds along sidewalks, house foundations etc., bait is normally required to get effective control, because the ant colony is protected under the concrete.

5. The next step up from the abamectin baits is the chemical growth regulators. These products do not kill ants, they obstruct their life cycle. This process is slow and should be looked at as a low toxic method to decreasing fire ant populations on large properties over a period of several months. Extinguish is a product that has demonstrated good results. As with most baits, it is best used in the spring and fall when ants are actively foraging.

Fire Ant Drench Formula

Homemade Fire Ant Mound Drench - mix one part compost tea, one part molasses and one part citrus oil concentrate. Mix at 4-6 ounces per gallon of water for treating fire ant mounds.
Abamectin is the natural product of a fungus, *Streptomyces avermitilis,* and is commercially available for killing mites and other insects including but not limited to ants and roaches.

Also see the **3-Step Organic Program to control fire ants**.

Grits for Ant Control **-** Corn grits has some control on fire ants. Use the regular or quick grits, not the instant grits. The quick grits work much better than the orange oil which has the tendency to kill grass. The grits kill all of the ants within 1 to 2 days while the orange oil may not. But, the ants may come back as they will continue to hatch. In that situation, just apply more grits. *Submitted by David Griffith*

Here is my take on why grits or cornmeal can inhibit Fire Ants.
Fire Ants vary their diet seasonly. Typically they go after proteins more in the Summer (worms or dead bugs or meats or animal oils, etc.). In the Fall and Winter, they diet more on carbohydrates. This is when starches (grains) are more appealing to their diet.
Probably what makes the cornmeal more effective in inhibiting Fire Ants is that they feed this to their larvae in order to break it down into a digestible food source for the adult Fire Ants. Their food source normally is based upon a type of fungal breakdown in concert with their young. This is inhibited by the cornmeal. The antifungal nature of the cornmeal/grits upsets this feeding cycle where the adults can not obtain their final food product (a fungus-based food secreted via the larvae). Essentially, the Fire Ants start to starve because their primary food source isn't happening - it has been "infected" as a result of the antifungal activities of the grits or cornmeal. Submitted by Tom Theimer