

Report infestations to:
State Pest Hotline: 643-PEST (643-7378)

For more information, contact:

Hawai'i Department of Agriculture
Hilo: 16 E. Lanikaula St, 989-9289—LFA only
Honolulu: 1428 S. King St, 973-9538
Kahului: 635 Mua St, 873-3962
Līhu'e: 4398 Pua Loke St, 274-3072

This brochure was created through cooperation among the following agencies:

Hawai'i Department of Agriculture
USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

University of Hawai'i at Mānoa,
College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources,
Dept. of Plant and Environmental Protection Sciences

Coordinating Group on Alien Pest Species
Pacific Cooperative Studies Unit
Hawaii Invasive Species Council,
Public Outreach Working Group

This brochure was made possible, in part, by a cooperative agreement from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). It may not express the views of APHIS.

Photos: W. Nagamine and C. Hirayama, HDOA,
Ranit Kirschenbaum, CTAHR

Production: Office of Communication Services,
College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources (CTAHR), University of Hawai'i at Mānoa.

The University of Hawai'i is an equal opportunity/affirmative action institution.

CTAHR Insect Pest publication IP-24 (rev.), Mar. 2010
CTAHR publications can be found at
www.ctahr.hawaii.edu/freepubs

Please kokua!

Stop the Little Fire Ant

A Tiny New Stinging Ant Spreading Across Hawai'i



Little fire ants on the big end of a chopstick

ALIEN PEST ALERT

Your help is needed in reporting this harmful pest and limiting its spread.
State Pest Hotline:
643-PEST (643-7378)

What is the little fire ant?

Little fire ants (LFA), *Wasmannia auropunctata*, are stinging ants that are new to Hawai'i, and spreading. In East Hawai'i, LFA are widespread between lower Puna and Laupāhoehoe. There is at least one infestation on both Kaua'i and Maui, and recent findings have been reported in Kona. New infestations should be reported to the Hawai'i Department of Agriculture (HDOA) immediately by calling 643-PEST or one of the offices listed on the back of this brochure.

LFA are transported to new sites in potted plants or on plant materials, green-waste, and rubbish. They are serious pests that infest yards and agricultural fields, and they will move into houses and other structures. The bites from these very tiny ants initially hurt and burn, and then may cause welts followed by intense itching that can last for two weeks or more.

LFA are found both on the ground and in vegetation. They climb onto plants of all sizes, including trees, but they easily fall off when the plants are disturbed. Activities such as pruning branches, harvesting fruit, or picking flowers in infested areas can cause LFA to rain down in large numbers. Some orchard workers in East Hawai'i have quit their jobs because of this.



LFA easily fall from trees and get under clothes



Pet with clouded corneas

In the Galapagos Islands, LFA prevent workers from harvesting coffee. While no serious injuries to people from LFA stings have been reported, those who might have an anaphylactic allergic reaction could suffer serious harm. Pets, livestock and wild animals are also at risk for LFA stings. Multiple stings in the eyes can result in blindness by secondary infection or even the death of newly born or small animals.

A heavy LFA infestation can negatively impact commercial, recreational, or residential uses of property, and the presence of the pest is a "disclosure issue" in property sales. Gloves, boots, and full-body covering are needed in severely infested areas, where any contact with foliage, including sitting on lawns, can invite stings.



Carefully inspect plants before transporting them

The ant is native to Central and South America, but it has spread around the Pacific. It was first noticed in Hawai'i in 1999 at Hawaiian Paradise Park in Puna. Although HDOA worked to contain the initial infestations, the ant already had been inadvertently spread from infested plant nurseries.

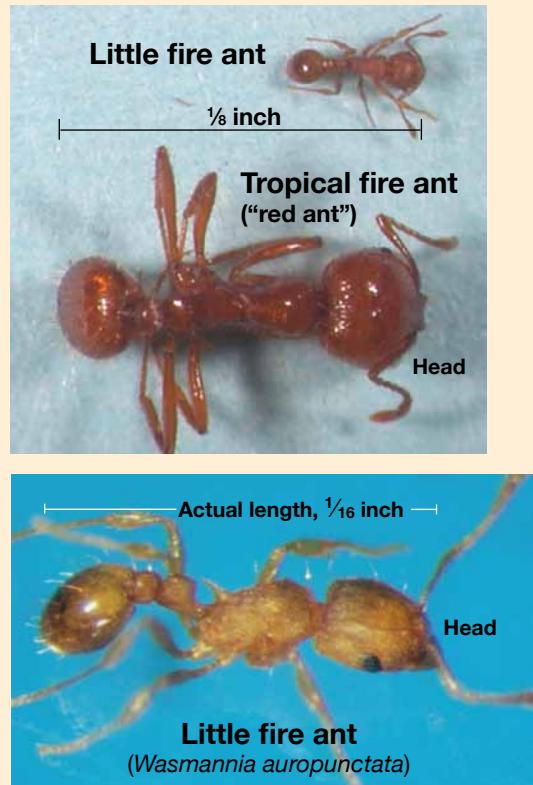
Eradication is being attempted on Kaua'i and Maui. On Hawai'i, where there are numerous infestations, limited agency resources and personnel make it virtually impossible to eradicate this pest or conduct adequate control programs. The public's help is essential in detecting the little fire ant where it is not yet known to be present and in assisting with serious, sustained efforts to control this pest on private properties.

Identifying

You can help by looking out for little fire ants, reporting their presence, and helping to control new infestations. Another stinging red ant, the tropical fire ant (*Solenopsis geminata*), locally called “red ant,” is common in Hawai‘i. Tropical fire ants are irritating but much less harmful than LFA.

Little fire ants

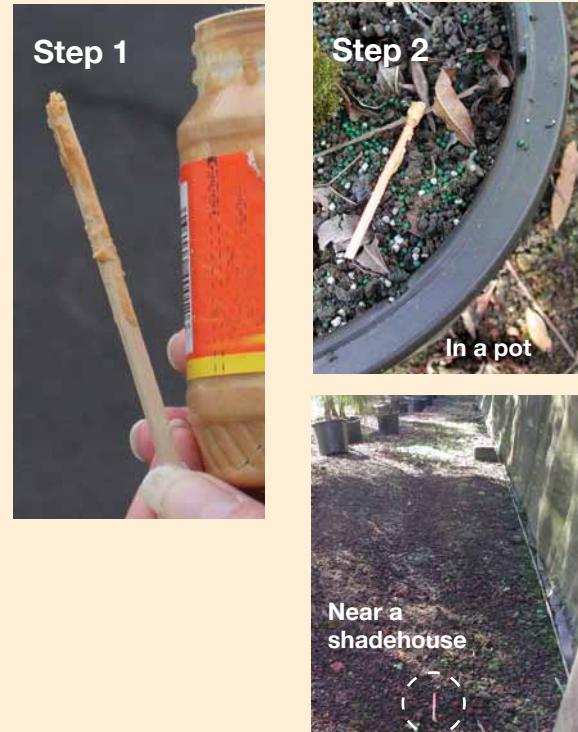
- are tiny red-orange ants $\frac{1}{16}$ inch long (about as long as a penny is thick); tropical fire ants are more than twice the size, $\frac{1}{8}$ – $\frac{1}{4}$ inch long
- are slow-moving until disturbed
- have workers that are all the same small size, unlike tropical fire ants, which have a few larger workers with bigger heads.



Examining the roots of potted plants for LFA is helpful, but the best way to detect LFA is to place a peanut butter-coated stick on the surface of the pot for an hour to see if it attracts ants. Whenever you purchase a new plant, doing this would be a reasonable precaution. If you have LFA, *do not transport* any plants or plant materials to other locations.

Step 1: Smear a *thin* coat of peanut butter on one end of wooden chopsticks or popsicle sticks (a thick coat doesn't work as well). You can spray-paint the sticks a bright color to make retrieval easier, but allow the paint to dry before applying the peanut butter.

Step 2: Place the sticks around your property, preferably in the shade, in plants and at the



Detecting

base of trees. Check the sticks after about an hour. LFA do not travel very far from their nests, so place sticks no more than 10–12 yards apart.

Step 3: Pick up sticks with ants—carefully or they will fall off—and put them in a sealable plastic bag. Other ants may also be attracted to the bait. Examine the ants on the peanut butter.

- Are they red-orange?
- Are they no longer than $\frac{1}{16}$ inch (the thickness of a penny)?
- Are they slow-moving, and do they fall off the stick easily when you tap the side of the stick?

Step 4: If you can answer YES to these questions, then you may have the little fire ant. Seal the plastic bag, write your name and phone number on the bag, and place it in the freezer

overnight to kill the ants. Please *do not transport* live ants.

To have the identification of the ants confirmed, drop off the bag at one of the Hawai‘i Department of Agriculture (HDOA) offices listed on the back of this brochure. Please provide the complete address of the site where the ants were found and a contact phone number.

Controlling

It is very important that you report suspected new infestations of LFA to the State Pest Hotline, 643-PEST (643-7378), and seek expert advice if you believe you have an LFA infestation. HDOA field staff can confirm identification, record the location, and advise you on how proceed.

Little fire ants are relatively easy to suppress in small areas, but they can be very difficult to eradicate completely. Mapping the infestation in your yard (or neighborhood) should be done before any pesticide is applied, or the extent of the infestation will not be known, and it will be harder to contain or eradicate it. Inform your neighbors once you have confirmed that LFA is present, and work cooperatively with them to combat the infestation.

Products such as Siege® Pro and Amdro® Pro (both hydramethylnon), Extinguish® Plus (hydramethylnon and methoprene), and Esteem® Ant Bait (pyriproxyfen) have been successfully used to control LFA infestations. These are granular

baits that can be purchased at hardware and garden stores or agrochemical supply companies. Quick-knockdown sprays do not provide a long-term solution. Foraging worker ants must carry the slower-acting poison found in baits back to the nest and feed it to other ants and the queen. Colonies can be killed in less than two weeks, but eradicating entire infestations requires consistent applications of bait in dry weather.

Infestations in or near food crops or other special sites must be controlled using products specifically labeled for such use. Read the label's directions carefully before you purchase or use the product. For help in assessing the suitability of a pesticide for your situation, contact an HDOA office.